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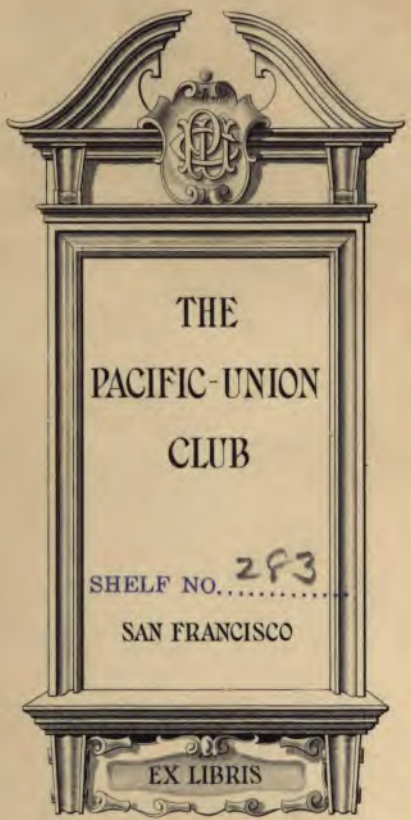

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TWO OFFENDERS

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

ON

TWO OFFENDERS.

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'The first story is pathetic and almost beautiful, as good in its particular line as anything she has done, for it is in stories of this sort—witness her "Two Little Wooden Shoes"—that Ouida excels.'—STANDARD.

De la Ramée, L

TWO OFFENDERS

BY OUIDA, pseud

'L'âge a toujours tort : s'il n'est pas déjà un absent, il le sera demain'

A NEW EDITION

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1894

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AN INGRATE

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An Ingrate

IT was a large, square, solemn edifice, built in the modern manner, pierced with regular rows of windows, the walls stuccoed, the roofs of zinc, the balconies green and gilded, the great hall door shining with glass and brass and polished woods. It stood in a vast, naked, gravelled space; around it were several acres of grounds, which were intended to be gardens, but which were as yet mere stony expanses, with dwarf trees and sickly shrubs dotted here and there, amidst them at intervals a plaster bust upon a plinth: the whole was surrounded by a high wall and enormous gates, always locked and lined with iron, so that they

afforded no glimpse whatever of the outer world. It was a building which might have been a prison, a madhouse, a school, or an academy; it could never have been mistaken for a home.

Above its imposing hall door was a statue of Charity, the eternal Charity with her hungry children, and above this group there was lettered in gold the name which the building bore: it was called Maison Mont Parnasse, for it was an abode of the Muses, at least of broken-down and unfortunate Muses, and had been but recently erected by some estimable persons kind enough to think that improvidence was not a capital sin. Nevertheless, though not perhaps a capital, it is a deadly, sin, and therefore the Maison Mont Parnasse had been kept unsmilingly and severely unattractive, though majestic. Charity always puts a little wormwood on the nipples of her breasts. She deems it only wise and just to do so. Milk given in alms ought not to taste sweet.

The motives which had led to the foundation and erection of Mont Parnasse had been honourable if, like most human motives, mixed. Two ragged boys had tramped upon foot from Alsace to Paris

in the reign of Charles Dix, and, beginning as little ragpickers, had crept on by thrift, and self-denial, and mutual devotion, from one step to another until they had become vast and rich traders, and had amassed a great many millions of francs, with which they knew not what to do, for they had no relations and had never married. They had not cared about titles or show, or any of the toys which most self-made men are crazy to play with, but they had felt a harmless ambition to associate their names before death with some great work or endowment which should make all Paris talk. So they set aside half their enormous capital to the execution of their scheme, and dedicated it to the establishment of a home for impecunious authors and artists; and the result was the great white house, which they called Mont Parnasse. The site was well chosen; a once royal park had been recently sold by the nation, and reduced to that state of nakedness, squalor and hideousness which is dear to the modern and public-spirited mind, and a large portion of this so-called forest was, after all the trees were felled and the undergrowth rooted up, acquired as the most suitable

location for the house of charity. A great architect was called in to build it, a great savant directed its drainage and sanitary arrangements. No expense was spared either with its erection or its decoration. 'When we do things at all we do them well,' said the brothers. The Maison Mont Parnasse was opened, inaugurated with a fine banquet, many compliments, and flowers of speech, and a throng of notabilities, little and big, including many shining lights of the press. One of these last brought in his pocket a hare's foot and a pot of rouge powder, and with a grave face tendered them to the brothers. The brothers looked a mute and astonished interrogation. The journalist pointed to the nine Muses whose statues adorned the vestibule.

'Faut les faire rougir un peu, les pauvrettes, hein?' he said, with serious countenance but twinkling eyes.

The brothers never knew till the days of their deaths where the point of the joke lay.

Their institution was a great, a noble, and a national benefit in their eyes; and, happily for themselves, they died too soon to discover their

error: they died whilst the walls were still damp, the paint was still moist, the gardens were still only existent on the parchment plans of landscape gardeners, and whilst Paris still took seriously and admiringly their *beau projet.* The gardens are still not laid out, except so far as a few groups of sickly young coniferæ may be considered to contribute to that end; but Paris, volatile Paris, has long forgotten that there exists an asylum for those servants of the Muses who have not bankers' balances. Yet it is well endowed, and so should command the respect due to wealth; it is also exceedingly well managed by a committee of influential gentlemen, financiers, merchants, publishers, editors, and the like, who distribute its favours and award its patronage with sincere and assiduous care. But they have never thought it worth while to lay out the gardens.

They are extremely mortified and astonished to find that their appointments are not always received with gratitude.

Every Mont Parnassian enjoys a private room, well furnished: three good meals a day, taken in the

common dining hall; a handsome allowance of fuel and light; the use of a good library, music room, and *salle des jeux* (all gambling, even for sous, forbidden); and for the rest has the whole range of the large grounds, which were once a royal woodland. The rules and restrictions are not onerous, or the committee do not think them so: any member may go out in the daytime, provided he leaves his name and key with the porter, but he cannot stay out after six o'clock without special permission from the resident manager; he must on no account keep any animal, bird, or pet of any kind, not even a white mouse (some one once had the impudence to bring a white mouse); he must not bring in any wines, spirits, or liqueurs; he must not have a light in his room after eleven at night; and he must receive no friends at any time except in the public sitting room, and that only from three to five of the clock. These regulations, and some few others similar, do not seem burdensome to the directorial mind. The present age is an age of regulations; it loves to tie people up with string, as the ingenious Mr. Maskelyne is tied up in the

cabinet, only it does not allow them, like him, to undo themselves. All these laws and bylaws are beautifully printed on embossed and illuminated cards, and hung up on the wall of each member's chamber; so that no Mont Parnassian can for a moment plead his ignorance of them. The directors do their duty, and sit in their velvet chairs round a long table, and hear the reports and audit the accounts of the great charity of Mont Parnasse; but when they have done that they have done enough; it is not incumbent upon them to know or to care whether the Mont Parnassians, once being in the institution, enjoy being there or dislike it; and it has never occurred to them to try and make the place look homelike. What would you? Sensible, prosperous men, who have never followed the *école buissonnière* in their prudent youth, cannot help a compassionate contempt for the poor scholars of that school, who have, like so many stray sheep, left all their fleeces on its wayside hedges.

They see that everything provided for the house is of the best. No small economies, no

ignoble little trickeries are permitted; the best meats, groceries, and cereals are sent there, and the best wine, in reason, that is, the best *petits vins; grands vins*, of course, it would be immoral to give under the circumstances. For all their trouble in seeing to these supplies, the directors could not be grudged the power of putting their favourites, their natural sons, hangers-on, or poor relations, in the various household situations which a large institution offers to be filled, from the secretaryship to the gatekeeper's place. This gratification, of course, they by right enjoy; but they do not vastly abuse even this privilege, and in their appointments to the memberships of the charity they are strictly impartial.

The Maison Mont Parnasse has been built and intended to receive half a hundred inmates, and funds have been provided for the due maintenance of that number. But the figure has never been reached, and many empty chambers and shuttered windows have testified to the sad fact that the best intentions are not always nor, it may be said, often appreciated by humanity.

'Yet the conditions are not at all onerous, not at all,' said one of the directors, a celebrated financier, when some one complained of these reasonable rules. 'They are really hardly more than hotel keepers nowadays put up in their visitors' rooms.'

'Only in an hotel one can blow up the manager, and walk out,' said a fellow-director, who was a famous newspaper proprietor.

'Every Mont Parnassian can walk out,' replied the financier severely; 'there is nothing to prevent him.'

'Except that he has nowhere to walk to, poor devil!' said the newspaper owner, who was fabulously rich now, but had known, in his early years, what it was to be poor: so poor that he had been obliged to pawn his solitary shirt.

'If a man when he comes to middle age have not provided himself with the safe shelter of a good home, he cannot complain of fortune—he has only his own improvidence to thank,' said the banker, who had inherited from his fathers a dozen millions of francs. 'By the way,' he added, 'I have been asked by M. D'Aumale and others to press the claims at our next meeting of Pierre Roscoff.

What say you? If absolute worthlessness be a qualification——'

'Oh, oh!' said the newspaper man deprecatingly. 'A fine talent—a very fine talent—in its day.'

'Talent without character!'

'Ah, well,' said the other with some impatience, 'we hear that said so often! As if all the dullards of necessity were angels! But do you really mean to say that Pierre Roscoff is living still? I thought he had been dead long ago. How horrible! To be alive in your body and dead in your genius!'

'Genius is too big a word,' said the banker.

'Ah, no! pardon me, it is not too big a word for what he was in his prime,' said the journalist warmly. '*Sapristi!* when one thinks of his "Jeunes Filles dansant au Pré" and his "Lune Rousse à Marly." What force! what feeling! what *maestria!* And you say he is alive and wants to get into the Parnasse? And for whom should its doors open if not for a man capable of that wondrous "L'Aube du Jour au Vésinet"? Why, I go to the Luxembourg to see it once every winter.'

'Should a man who has had work bought for the Luxembourg need the Parnasse?' asked the financier dryly, opening a little gold fusee box.

'In what scope was the institution created?' asked the other. 'Surely mediocrity and dull nullity are neither comprised nor contemplated in its provisions?'

'Then you will give him your vote?'

'Assuredly.'

'Go further, and propose him. The office will suit you better than me.'

'A dubious compliment from your point of view; but I accept it. Are you sure he is living?'

'Quite sure. I breakfasted at Chantilly yesterday, and the Duc gave me his address; it is a miserable garret in the Temple.'

'*Dieu de dieux!*' said the other once more: the grim comedy of having your picture purchased for the Luxembourg, and your body left to rot in an attic unremembered, stirred even the sated humour of the owner of the sharpest and wittiest journal of Paris. 'Br-r-r-r!' he said with a shudder, half real,

half affected; 'I will propose him with the greatest pleasure. He certainly fulfils the conditions of our admirable Institute if he be as miserable as he used to be famous. That has been our difficulty. It has been so easy to find misery, but not so easy to find fame in the ditch. Genius has a knack in our days of dining and dressing well. It is generally "swagger," as the dear English say.'

In truth it was very easy, as he had said, to find misery, but not so easy to find misery allied to fame, or even to conspicuous talent. It had therefore been found necessary to enlarge a little the original conditions of the endowment, and to extend its benevolence to persons who did not strictly come within its original provisions, and some journalists, some professors, and some musicians, who were not composers, enjoyed what had been designed only for genuine artists. So that when the rich journalist, Maurice Valbranche, proposed to elect to membership such a man as Pierre Roscoff, the whole committee, when it managed to recall who he was, and had recovered its astonishment at learning that he was alive, accepted his

nomination with unanimity, and even with enthusiasm. Here was the true material for which the house of the Parnassians had been designed. A great artist, an undeniably great artist, yet so fallen into obscurity that everybody had thought he was dead, in miserable circumstances, too, very miserable, repeated the prosperous men around the board table with that relish of whose savours Lucretius has spoken. He was elected without a dissentient voice, and the directors made haste to go to their cosy broughams on a rainy morning with a pleasant sense as of some virtuous act performed.

'He will end his days at least in peace,' said Valbranche to himself; 'that is to say, if he will go; perhaps he won't go, *que diable!*'

For, in their haste to please a royal Academician, it had never occurred to them to consult Pierre Roscoff himself. They had even broken a bylaw of the board, which prescribed that when suitable subjects for the enjoyment of the charity were selected, they should personally and by letter be themselves informed of the fact of their selection before their names were put to the vote, and should be directed

to solicit their own appointment by letter on stamped paper. Valbranche, in his gratification at having secured a real son of the Muses, had hurried on the matter, and had gone through the formula of the aged artist's election without having previously consulted him as to his presentation.

'*Que diable!*' he said again; 'of course he will be enchanted. A roof over your head, and a good bellyful secured to you till your grave, is no small boon when you are seventy years old and already dead to the world.'

Valbranche was a good-natured man, with the shallow patronising good nature born of prosperity, and that sense of superiority, not only of fortune, but of wisdom, which prosperity begets.

He drove down in his admirably appointed *coupé*, with its high-stepping horse, into the miserable little street in the quarter of the Temple in which it was said that Pierre Roscoff lived, and, with some qualms and misgiving, slowly clambered a steep, dark, dirty stair, on which it was not wholly prudent for an arch-millionaire, in broadcloth and with valuable rings and chains about him, to

adventure his person. He was stout, for he lived very well, and the ascent was long and steep, and made him draw his breath painfully. He wished that he had sent up one of the young men of his office: the many talented and enterprising young men who clustered round him like wasps around a hogshead of molasses.

Charity was soothing to the soul, but it was best done vicariously.

Gasping, puffing, and muttering many a droll slang oath, he came at last to the end of the stairs, under a skylight hung with cobwebs. On a wall, once whitewashed, now grey and black with grime, there was a piece of wood, and on it was written in charcoal: 'Pierre Roscoff: *deuxième à droite.*'

'At last!' said Valbranche, with a groan and a sigh of resignation. He found the door indicated, the low, miserable, unpainted door of a garret, and knocked.

'Come in,' said the voice of an old man, a voice with the quaver of age in it, but still rich and melodious; it was half drowned in the impetuous barkings of a dog.

Valbranche opened the door, and as hastily retreated; for a little rough terrier flew at his heels, and, like many good men whose flowery paths of success have not been always straight ones, he was afraid of dogs.

'Quiet!' said the owner of the dog. 'Come in, monsieur. He will not hurt you. He took you for a *huissier*. Pardon his mistake.'

'A pretty compliment!' said Valbranche below his breath; but he took off his hat, and, with an unaffected respect, said, 'M. Roscoff, I think? I am honoured in making the acquaintance of a great artist whose works I have revered all my days.'

A slight colour rose to the hollow pale cheeks of the old man.

'*Tiens, tiens, tiens!*' he murmured with a slight smile, whimsical and humorous. 'It is a very long time indeed since I heard any language like that. Am I dead, and in my tomb a-dreaming?'

'No, *mon maître*, and I know not why you have ceased to hear it,' said Valbranche, 'except that you

have ceased to let men hear of you. That is always fatal. Humanity has a short memory, and no gratitude.'

'Eh! I died in effect twenty years ago.'

Roscoff was a tall, bony, muscular man, who in his fleshlessness still gave the impression of great strength; he had harsh features and no beauty except in his eyes, which were large and brown, and in the expression of his countenance, which was humorous and benignant. He looked extremely poor, and the naked chamber in which he lived was without comfort of any kind, though it was clean and was orderly.

'How did you come to this pass?' asked Valbranche, astonished and embarrassed.

'Monsieur comes to interview me?' asked Roscoff in return. 'Ah, no, that is not possible; no one interviews the *disparus*.'

'But why did you disappear?'

'Ah, decidedly, then, it *is* an interview,' said Roscoff with good humour, but with a certain accent of dignity which made his visitor feel awkward. 'This is very droll; I had no idea that I was so

much alive. And what a suffocating weight of honour—M. Valbranche in his own person!'

'You know me?' said the other, surprised.

'Ah! as the ragpicker and the crossing-sweeper knows the great generals and deputies who drive by and splash him with their carriage wheels. But pray be seated, monsieur. Since you have climbed so high, I will not dismiss you in a hurry.'

He pushed forward the only chair which the garret possessed, a large wooden one with arms, and seated himself on the deal table in the centre of the room.

Then Valbranche saw that his right hand was missing; it had been cut off above the wrist. 'That is why he has painted no more,' he thought, and said gently:

'An accident, *cher maître*?'

'A bit of shell during the siege,' replied the artist curtly.

'Ah, heavens! what a loss to the world!'

'Pooh! there are many painters.'

'There is but one Roscoff.'

'In his sorrows I hope there is not his equal,'

said the old man, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'Might I inquire your errand, monsieur? It cannot be to ask me how I lost my hand, since you were unaware that I had lost it.'

'My errand? I hope you will acquit it of idle curiosity, and credit it at least with good intentions when you hear what it is,' answered Valbranche, and he told it, a little embarrassed by the independence and indifference of this lonely old man, who half sat, half leaned, upon the rickety deal table, and in all his poverty looked neither like a suppliant nor a receiver of alms. The little rough terrier sat beside him bolt upright with pricked ears and inquiring gaze.

In a few eloquent phrases and less condescension of tone than was usual with him, Valbranche informed the recipient of the Mont Parnasse charity.

'Through my influence and in view of your great celebrity in past years, the Committee has dispensed with the usual formal preliminaries and personal application, and has elected you *motu proprio* to be an inmate of this great and noble institution,' he said in conclusion, falling into the

official diction common to all board-rooms. 'On the advantages accruing therefrom I need not dilate. They are self-evident. The beneficent and magnificent character of the charity is no doubt well known to you by hearsay; and, no doubt, you will as fully appreciate its assistance as we, who represent it, appreciate our good fortune in associating with it the name and fame of so great an artist as yourself.'

Thereon he paused and took breath, feeling that no one could have discharged the mission, or expressed its views, with greater delicacy and eloquence. He looked at Roscoff, in anticipation of some profound emotion, some burst of gratitude, some gush of tears; but the old man had not moved or spoken, or given any sign of any feeling. A red spot had come on each of his hollow cheeks; that was all.

'Have I asked anyone for anything?' he said hoarsely at length.

'No, no, certainly not; at least, not that I know of,' said Valbranche with some confusion.

'Then who has any right to put my name forward for charity?'

'But it would seem——' began his visitant, and paused as he glanced around the miserable room. The glance completed the sentence.

'I am in complete misery, if you mean that,' said Roscoff curtly. 'But from misery to asking for aid there is a step, and a long one. I have not taken that step. It is only when I shall ask that you will have the right to offer.'

He rose from his half-sitting attitude and stood erect, as though to signify that the interview was ended. There was no more to say.

Valbranche did not rise; he looked up through his eyeglasses in surprise, amusement, and doubt: the doubt of a man who is accustomed to have comedies of all kinds played off on him. Yet through his scepticism, his cynicism, and his incredulity, some admiration, some belief stirred in him. He saw that this old recluse—starving and ragged, and friendless and cheerless as he might be—yet meant what he said. He had never asked anyone for anything; he had let the world forget him as it chose, and had never said, 'I am here.'

At that moment there entered the attic, im-

petuously as a little gust of March wind, a child, a pretty, fair, curly-headed boy of six years old, who, darting towards the dog and the old man, stopped short suddenly in alarm at the sight of a stranger.

'Come, my Max,' said Roscoff gently, whilst the terrier jumped about the child with affectionate welcome.

'Salute this gentleman, Max.'

Max pulled his little ragged straw hat off his curls.

'A charming child,' said Valbranche. 'Is he yours?'

'My son's child, yes. My son was killed with Henri Rivière by the Pavillons-Noirs.'

'You have indeed claims on the country.'

'No, we have no claims. My son was only a volunteer, as I was before him. He had not been successful in life, and he loved adventure.'

'And this little one depends wholly on you?'

'Yes.'

Roscoff's face grew dark and harsh. He did not like interrogation, and he thought that he had

said so plainly enough to have been understood. The little boy Max, who was thin and pale though happy-looking, leaned against his grandfather and murmured a little timidly:

'They would not give the bread without the four sous.'

'Be silent,' said Roscoff angrily; but already Valbranche had overheard.

He pulled some loose silver out of his pocket and held it to the child.

'Run away, Max, and buy some cakes; your grandfather and I are talking of grave matters, which would not amuse little men like you.'

The child's pretty eyes smiled and lightened; he stretched out his small hand for the money, but Roscoff caught his fingers in a grip unconsciously hard.

'Monsieur means well, my child, and you mean no ill, but I cannot allow that. Here is one sou. Run down and buy a roll, and ask them to let you eat it in the shop. Go.'

The little boy hesitated, tears rising to his eyes.

'But, grandfather,' he said shyly, 'you have

eaten nothing since yesterday at noon: all there was for supper you gave to Pepin and me. And there is only this one sou, you know, because you said so when I went to the shop.'

'Hold your prating baby tongue and go,' said Roscoff in tones of thunder.

The child slunk away terrified, the sou in his little thin hand. Pepin knew better than to be afraid; he only edged nearer to his master.

'*Cher maître*,' said Valbranche, 'all this is very honourable, but it is very sad. For the sake of the child you must sacrifice your pride. Come to the Parnasse, and little Max shall go to some good school; I will see to it myself. You have every right to starve yourself if it please you, but you have no right to injure your son's child.'

'And you have no right to dictate my duties to me. Go out!' said the old man with stern fury.

'I will go,' said Valbranche with good-humoured patience. 'I will go, for I have many engagements; but I shall return.'

On his way down the staircase he stumbled

over the little boy Max, who was sitting sobbing on one of the lower stairs.

'Are you often hungry, little one?' he asked.

The child answered unwillingly: 'Not I; but he is. He gives all there is to Pepin and me.'

'And there is not much for him?'

'No,' said the child timidly, through his tears. 'But he would be angry if he knew you spoke to me. I will not listen to you; I will not answer!' he said with resolution and fear combined, and he gathered himself up where he was crouched against the wall, and ran down the rest of the stairs as fast as his little legs could take him. He was afraid that the gentleman would offer him silver pieces again, and that he would be weak and wicked enough to take them; for though he had had all there was, he had shared that all fairly with Pepin, and he was very hungry, though his loyalty to his grandfather had made him deny it to a stranger.

'Poor little animal!' said Valbranche to himself; 'he will be the lever by which we shall get old Obstinacy into the Parnasse.'

For opposition had produced its usual effect

upon human nature, and Valbranche, to whom the matter really had no actual or practical importance whatever, was now so irritated by his own failure that he was resolved to drag Pierre Roscoff to the institution whether he would or no.

Roscoff remained standing beside the table, the dog looking uneasily up in his face, knowing that he was disturbed and troubled. In truth, he had been so long alone, so long accustomed to be unnoticed, forgotten, that the visit of such a man as Valbranche and the offer made by him could not leave him unmoved. It had startled, offended, disgusted, agitated him, but it had made him feel that the living world and he were not altogether alien as they had been so many years. Some one, and some one who was no fool, no dunce, had once more called him *cher maître*, the old flattering, caressing, admiring title which so long had been unheard! Was he still a master of his art in the eyes of anybody—he, a poor, old, broken, starving man, who for a score of years had never been able to touch a brush?

He had been the son of seafaring people of the coast of Morbihan; owners of fishing barques and

trading smacks, used to wind, wet weather, and rude fare; well-to-do in their rough manner, and come, it was said, of a once knightly and saintly race. In his boyhood he had drawn ships and boats and sailors on every bit of wood or paper he could find, and when he was eighteen years old he had come up from the sea coast to Paris, driven by the spur of the strong half-unconscious genius in him to go where he could hear, and learn, and see, the meaning of art.

'What a fool I was!' he thought sometimes, recalling that passionate pilgrimage. 'What did I want with masters? Had I not the face of the sky and the voice of the sea above me and beside me?'

In his prosperous years he had gone back thither often, and steeped himself in the salt strong scent of the seaweed, and the wet sands, and the golden glory of the inland gorse. But since the war he had never been able to see Morbihan. Even if he could have scraped together enough for the journey, he would not have cared to go before his kindred a poor, crippled, beggared man. Those who were still alive were but distant kin to him; they, like the world of

Paris, were content to suppose that he was no longer amongst the living. So many disappeared during the great siege and during the Commune, of whom there is no record. Their death is taken for granted. So was his in the Breton village of his birth as in the streets of Paris.

Had he been well off he would have sought out the remnant of his people; but he was very poor, always after the loss of his hand, and when his son fell dead beside Henri Rivière he no longer even cared to ask if others less near to him of his blood still lived. Now and then the thought crossed him remorsefully that for the sake of little Max he should not have let himself sink into such utter oblivion and isolation. But little Max was only a natural child, a child born of a brief hot flame of Bohemian love, and had no claim on anyone, not even on his grandfather unless his grandfather chose.

Little Max and Pepin—who would care for either if he died? One would go on the parish and the other to the *fourrière*. How often had he lain awake in the long cold nights of winter, racked with terrible thoughts of their utter loneliness should he

die suddenly or by accident, as he might do at any hour! No one cared for them. No one would give either of them a home. Without him, both were lost. How often he had pondered on this, and tortured himself about it, and longed to live, though life was painful, for their sakes! And now that some one came who offered to provide for him—which would, no doubt, directly or indirectly, be also providing for them—he was merely offended, violent, sensible only of his own pride and scorn. Was that right? Was that wrong? He could not tell.

He was no analyst, no logician. He was an artist, and his feelings were all intense, but little reasoned on or studied. Was it his duty, when it would raise up friends for the friendless child, to enter into this house of bondage which was so hateful to him?

He could not think so.

He came of a free, proud stock; he had been a man of genius, and he had been a soldier, though an informal and unrecognised one; he had fought for France, for Paris. Should he go and end his days in the shameful ease of an asyluin with a fine name?

Once they had sent to him in his prime to attend at the Tuileries, and he had not gone there because he was a republican; and his refusal had lost him the Cross; but the Emperor, always generous—always generous, poor betrayed Badinguet!—had bought one of his finest pictures for St. Cloud, and had caused 'L'Aube du Jour au Vésinet,' which was deemed his masterpiece, to be purchased for the Luxembourg.

Ah, that poor picture which went to St. Cloud!

It was gone in the fire, and smoke, and ruin of the beautiful palace, gone with the frescoes of Mignard and so many other fair and gracious things.

And he had not even a sketch left to him of the thousands of sketches in charcoal, in sepia, in water colour, in oil, which he had made during his life as an artist—not a single sketch on which he could feast his eyes, and by which he could realise what he once had been. He had not even a pencil line of his own left to remind him of those beautiful early days when he had been truly a great painter, and people had pointed him out to each other at the 'Vernissage' and the 'Chat

Noir,' and on the boulevards, in the bright gay years before the war, when it seemed as though everyone were young, and Paris laughed all day and danced all night. They had all been sold, most often for a pittance, to meet the wants of others. The only thing left of that glorious time was an old worn palette, with the splashes of dried, dusty, cracked colours still adhering to it, which sometimes he would pass on to the thumb of his left hand and lean against his arm, and with it would stand thinking, thinking, thinking—dreaming that an easel was before him, and a wide white canvas, and on that imagined canvas seeing lovely or terrible, or fantastic or solemn visions. When one has been born artist or poet one dreams till one dies.

The spectre which was so familiar in his quarter, poverty, was his daily guest. Since his loss of his hand, he had taught drawing, as well as a man can teach it, orally, without using a pencil; but his pupils were now very few, all poor, scattered in divers and far-separated directions, and of late years he had found none, and had been reduced to doing

such work as he could find. There was a shop for which he went errands, and these took him long, long tramps into the various *arrondissements*, which wore up much shoe leather and brought him in little emolument. Everything he had possessed of any value had gone long before, even before the birth of Max, for his son had been unfortunate and unhappy.

And they asked him to go to Mont Parnasse to be well housed, well clothed, well fed, to sleep on a soft bed, to sit in an easy chair, to know neither heat nor cold, neither fatigue nor hunger; to be safe, and at ease, and in comfort, all the rest of his remaining years, however many they might be; 'and I come of a strong, hard seaborn race,' he thought, 'I shall live long.'

After all he was only sixty-six, though suffering and privation had made him look many years older. There might be a long life still before him: a life as long as a whole generation; and the cruel, unpitied, dull, colourless tragedy of old age, in its innumerable needs and its innumerable losses, is only made supportable if it be left in peace and soothed by plenty.

He knew that; yet the thought of the benevolent institution was odious to him, more intolerable than either want or pain. The benefactors might gild the chains as they would, but they none the less would be chains; they might sweeten the pill as they might, but all the same it would be bitter as gall with the wormwood of alms.

'Never! never!' he said in his grey beard where he stood beside the table. He had been aways free. He had never asked favour or loan or gift. In the worst struggles and sorrows of his life he had always 'shut his soul in silence,' and borne his calamity as best he might, alone. 'A pauper?—a pensioner?—never!' he said between his clenched teeth; he was too old a dog to be put in a wadded kennel.

The little white face of Max under its tumbled fair curls looked in at the door fearfully, then with hesitation the little boy crept across the brick floor to his grandfather's side.

'Grandfather,' he said in a whisper, 'you are not angry now? I didn't mean to do wrong—I didn't know.'

'Of course not, my poor baby,' said the old man as he took him in his arms. 'I was vexed and pained, and I spoke too harshly, my little one; I meant no blame.'

'Pepin was not afraid,' said Max, envious of the terrier's superior wisdom.

'No, dear; dogs do not mind our words, they read our hearts.'

'Why can't children too?'

'Alas, my Max! children are only men and women in little.'

Max kissed him, and then kissed Pepin. None of the three had any supper that night, but they slept close to each other, and did not sleep ill.

It had been March when Valbranche had paid him his first visit. Through the following spring and summer he did not ill; his carrying work seemed light in fine weather; often both the dog and the little boy trotted by his side. On Sundays they would all get out to the woods, or to the banks of the river; that familiar Seine which he had so loved to paint in the days of his good fortune. The sky was often blue, the workgirls were good to Max

for sake of his pretty eyes and curls, the students tossed chicken-bones to Pepin. They were very poor, very miserable, but they managed to enjoy something. The dog frisked and the boy frolicked, and he forced himself to smile on both.

All the spring Valbranche came or sent to him and repeated his offer, and got the same answer.

'Headstrong old brute!' said the rich man with natural impatience.

The board of the great institution could not understand the refusal of its benevolence; Valbranche softened down the ingratitude, explained it away, pleaded for time, obtained it. It did not matter to him in the least, but he had determined to have his own way; he had never failed; he did not intend to fail in this affair. It became a question of personal pique to him to see Pierre Roscoff a member of the Maison Mont Parnasse.

'You cannot cage old hawks, sir,' said one of his young men who liked to tease him.

'Yes, you can,' said Valbranche savagely, 'when you pick them up half frozen off the snow in the leafless woods.'

'But they do not live,' said the irreverent disciple.

'Hawks may not,' replied his patron. 'I know little of the habits of wild birds or of tame ones; but men and women, my dear boy, live and are glad to live wherever they eat and drink well.'

Everyone had his price he knew, as Walpole and most men of the world knew it; if you did not effect the purchase it was because you failed to hit on the kind of coin to offer.

'All men, however, are not selfish,' he said to his young companion, 'but almost all of us are such damnable egotists that we forget that. There are persons whom you must not tempt through themselves, but through others.'

He set about the persuasion of Roscoff through little Max.

The child was naturally healthy, but he was not strong; he was of a constitution which wanted pure air, warmth, care, good food, and mirth; the blue veins showed dangerously on his fair temples and on his tiny thin hands, and his chest was very narrow and his limbs were very small and thin. In the

summer he did tolerably well, though six days out of the week he only breathed the close, sickly, thick air of crowded streets, breathed through thousands of other lungs, and full of noxious germs. But in the cold weather he shrank and suffered visibly, like a little plant which wants the vanished sunshine and is left to wither and shrivel in a cellar.

Valbranche said so once with a rude sincerity to his grandfather.

'I know it; I see it,' said Roscoff sharply. 'What can I do?'

'You know what you could do,' answered Valbranche.

Roscoff turned his back on him.

One day Valbranche saw the old man alone, carrying a number of light parcels. With Valbranche was a famous physician; they were going together to the Salpêtrière to see some hypnotic experiments. Valbranche asked his friend to turn aside and see the child, whom they found with the dog in the little close room where the old woman, who was porteress, bed-maker, and *réveilleuse* to the whole household, lived both by night and day.

She had once been a country woman in a forest district of the Jura, and was honest and kind in a rough way, and did the child no harm.

The physician examined Max, said nothing, and drove away.

'Well?' said Valbranche.

'It is the old story: poor food, poor blood, bad air, want of oxygen, of ozone. There is no organic disease, only want of tone and stamina; they are all alike, these children. This one will die in a year or so.'

And the great man sneered in scorn at the monotony and folly of humankind.

'No organic disease?' said Valbranche. 'Then if he were well nourished and taken care of in better circumstances, he would get strong and well in all probability?'

'No doubt,' said the physician indifferently. 'All these cases are mere matters of ozone and feeding.'

'Would you mind writing that down?'

'Why?'

'Because the child has an obstinate grandfather,

whom your name might convince of the danger to the boy of keeping him there.'

His friend looked at him sharply.

'If the child belong to you, you are late in looking after him, my good friend. He does not do you credit.'

'I have nothing to do with him in the way you fancy. But I wish to save him. Will you mind writing it down?'

The physician tore a leaf out of his pocket-book and wrote. Everyone, even famous doctors, liked to oblige Valbranche. Then they went to the hypnotised woman at the Salpêtrière, who was a very interesting case, as in her hypnotised state she had been made to believe that she was being burned at the stake for a witch and suffered all the agonies of that fearsome death, to the infinite amusement of scientific professors and their students: to be able to torture by automatic suggestion is a great improvement on the clumsier efforts of the Inquisition; it needs no instruments and no accomplices, and its range of action is practically unlimited.

The next day Valbranche inclosed the declara-

tion of the doctor with a brief line added by himself, 'The child must die inevitably if you continue to persist in refusing to allow us to save him.' He posted the document to the child's grandfather.

It mattered nothing to him, of course, whether the child died or not, but he was determined to vanquish obstinacy. His own obstinacy was a virtue, but that of others was a fault and an affront. He is not alone in this impression.

The next day, to the elegant and luxuriously furnished rooms which he used himself in the offices of his journal on the Boulevard Poissonnière, came an old man, lean, gaunt, haggard, in threadbare clothes, and with so miserable an aspect that the porter at the doors hesitated to admit him, and thought of dynamite and anarchists.

'I am not one of those people,' said Roscoff, divining the unspoken apprehension of the liveried Cerberus. 'I well might be, but I am not. Send in my name to M. Valbranche. You will see he will receive me.'

After much grumbling and suspicion the porter

consented to send the name up the tube which communicated with the rooms of the proprietor.

'Let him come to me immediately,' was the reply down the tube, and to the scandal of the concierge the muddy, cracked, infamous boots of the gaunt old man trod in their ascent the blue velvet pile of the broad carpeted stairs.

'Take my word for it, there is nitro-glycerine in his pocket with his pipe and his pence,' said the guardian of the portals to his wife. 'Mind the door a moment, Palmire; I will just slip round to the commissary of police.'

Prudence was the better part of valour, he thought, and in his absence if his better half were blown into the air in atoms he would not weep more than decency would necessitate.

Meanwhile Roscoff mounted the staircase, with its gilded bronze stands for the electric light, and the marble statues of Memory and Silence, which were considered by the proprietor to be symbolical of the Press and suited to its halls.

'Ah, my friend!' said Valbranche cheerfully where he was seated in a large writing chair, with a

cigarette in his mouth and a liqueur stand and a siphon of mineral water before him. 'Come in, sit down, take *deux doigts de Kurmiel.* It is good; it was made in Petersburg. No? You are wrong. A cigar at least? No? More wrong than ever. Well!'

Roscoff refused the seat indicated to him, and the liqueur and the cigar; he remained standing, the white seams and frayed edges of his poor coarse clothes staring in the mellow sunlight which poured in from a large window shaded by gold-coloured silk blinds. He was an incongruous, unseemly figure in that rich temple of the modern Mercury, and he felt this, and it embarrassed and for the moment unnerved him.

'Well!' said Valbranche, with a little less cheeriness, a little more asperity, for his time was precious; 'you have received my letter?'

'Yes,' said the old man slowly, with a heavy sigh. 'Yes—yes; if you are interested in my poor little boy, take him, he is all; but I will give him up to you to save him.'

Tears rose into the brown eyes of Roscoff, which

had still, despite age and want, a certain beauty in them, the beauty which comes from the soul of the artist.

'I will give him up to you,' he repeated, his voice low and tremulous.

'Too good!' said Valbranche, with a little cruel sarcasm. With suspicion in his tone he looked sharply at Roscoff, and added, 'The condition! You understand the condition? You accept? You go?'

'Why—oh, why any condition at all?' said the old man with nervous force, the floodgates of emotion and speech opening in him. 'You see a dying child; your man of science says that he must die without air and food and medicines and comforts. What wants he more to give him favour in your sight? Save him for his own sake! Save him for the mere all-sufficient joy of doing a good action! I will give him up to you entirely, and will go away somewhere, never mind where, to live out the few years which may still drag upon me. What do you want more? Save the child! I will promise that neither you nor he shall ever be troubled by or see

me ever again. Save the child! Has he not title enough to your compassion? He is six years old, and is dying of bad air and poor food.'

He spoke with all the eloquence and fervour of intense feeling. Valbranche put his eyeglasses to his eyes and watched him curiously. How odd it was that an old man should agitate himself thus!

'My poor friend,' he replied in that dry, mocking, incisive manner which his editors and staff dreaded so intensely. 'There are several hundred thousand children in Paris who require pure air and good food; you might as well say that I should charge myself with them all. Despite my unbounded and sincere respect for the Faculty, it cannot be said that they have successfully conquered anæmia, or marasma, or any of the many forms of névrose. It is not in my duties or in my capacities to remedy their failures. I will give your grandson everything he requires, and keep my share of the compact loyally. But I will only do so if you on your part consent to go to the Institute of Mont Parnasse.'

'What can it matter to you where I go?' asked Roscoff passionately. 'If an old dog whom everyone has forgotten crawls into a corner to die, what concern is it of anyone's where he stretches out his wretched limbs in their last tremor? If I am a fool who prefers to starve in liberty and independence rather than to feast and fatten on charity, what can my choice matter to you? It is I who shall suffer by it. Save the child because he is a child, because he suffers for no fault of his own; for he was born healthy and without blemish. Save the child, and let me go where I will. Only leave me my freedom. It is all I ask.'

Valbranche made a little impatient, irritated gesture, and pushed away the crystal flask of *Kurmiel* and drew to him his blotting-pad and writing-paper.

'You rave, my respected friend,' he said curtly; 'and I never have ten minutes to waste. Go to the Maison Mont Parnasse, and the boy shall be cared for like a prince; if not, take him away; keep him with you for the few months he will live, and do not come to me to pay for his burial.'

Then he touched the button of his electric bell. A servant appeared in the doorway.

'That is your last word?' asked the old man piteously, the nerves of his face working convulsively.

Valbranche did not appear to hear him. 'Show monsieur downstairs,' he said to the servant, and he began writing with that rapidity and precision which characterised all that he did.

'Wait!' said Roscoff breathlessly; the veins on his forehead stood out like steel-grey cords.

'Come, sir!' whispered the servant impatiently, seeing in him some threadbare supplicant of whom the great journalist was wearied.

'Wait!' said Roscoff, putting up his hand to his throat, as though his loose, ragged collar choked him. 'If—if—there be no other way to save him, I will go.'

'Bravo!' said Valbranche, resuming all his cheery and cordial good humour; and he leaned over his writing table, half rising, and, to his footman's amazement, stretched out his hand to the tall, lean, ragged, miserable man out of the streets.

To his servant's still greater amazement, the miserable man out of the streets did not take it, but turned abruptly and went towards the door.

'Write that to me,' cried Valbranche. 'Put it in black and white.'

Roscoff nodded, and in perfect silence, waving aside the servant, he opened the door and went. Valbranche looked after his retreating figure with some stupefaction.

'*Quel drôle!*' he muttered to himself, and lighted a fresh cigarette and resumed his correspondence.

Two days later Max was driven away in a carriage behind two ponies by a lady, who was the widow of a physician, and who took the charge of delicate little boys under the age of ten. She had made objections to having such a waif and stray on account of his illegitimate birth and defective education; but the person entrusted with the negotiations had whispered that the child was a *petite faute* of a high personage, for which it was desired to make as much reparation as possible; and the lady had yielded, touched a little—for she

was a woman of heart—by the small pale pathetic face and pretty fair curls of her new pupil.

'You will be very happy with me, dear,' she said to him. 'You will have a beautiful garden to play in, with kind playfellows, and nice clothes, and everything which is nicest to eat, and a pony to ride on, and doves and rabbits to feed——'

'But I want grandfather and Pepin!' sobbed Max, hiding himself, in an agony of timidity and grief, in a corner of the carriage. 'I want grandfather and Pepin! Take me back! Take me back!'

'Yes; I know, my love. Of course, of course,' said the strange lady, in a soft voice, stroking his tumbled hair. But in herself she said, for she knew children and their natures: 'And in a day you will laugh and romp, and in a week you will have forgotten them both. Poor grandfather, poor Pepin—whoever they are! It will be they who will not forget.'

But for the moment Max was not to be quieted or consoled.

In the garret which he had quitted for ever his

grandfather and the dog were left; the latter was looking on and whining interrogatively, whilst the former put together the few cheap toys and the two-sous picture books which had been all the pleasures Max had ever had. Roscoff dusted each tenderly, and wrapped each up separately in paper, then made them altogether into one parcel.

'He is dead, Pepin, dead to us!' he said in answer to the dog's pained, perplexed, entreating gaze. Pepin shivered, and his tail drooped sadly.

Then his master turned and took up some new clothes, good clothes, which were lying on the rough deal table, with linen, with boots, with a felt hat, and a watch and chain.

Valbranche had sent them.

'When I do a thing at all I do it well and ungrudgingly,' said Valbranche to his secretary, with the self-admiration of the self-made man. He was by nature generous, and to give largely pleased his sense of greatness and of power.

'The clothes of the prison house, Pepin,' murmured Roscoff.

Slowly he undressed and put on the new gar-

ments. He had resolved that he would drain the cup of humiliation to the dregs. Freedom, self-respect, pride, were things which were no more his. He had given them away as the price of his grandson's safety. He looked at himself in the little bit of cracked mirror which hung upon one of the walls; it was many years since he had been decently dressed like this. He had already trimmed his beard and hair. His open razor was lying on the rickety chair beneath the glass; as he saw it a great longing darted into his eyes; he seized and shut it, and flung it into a corner violently, as if it were a living creature with speech who tempted him. His eyes closed a moment, like those of a man who has been seized with vertigo on the edge of a cliff and has drawn back in time.

He was of Breton blood, and in his youth he had been taught that a self-sought death slays both the body and the soul. In that moment the memory of his mother rose before him out of the mist of years: a pious, tender, good woman, walking twenty miles across the landes to a Pardon, gathering her children round her in prayer for those at sea when

the winds shook the timbers of their cabin on the shore, and the rush of the incoming waves broke over their garden wall.

'Poor mother!' he said, with a choking sigh. She had been dead fifty years.

He roused himself and said to Pepin: 'Come.'

Pepin, at all other times so joyous at any sound or signal which hinted of a walk, crept slowly after him, as though knowing that he left for ever a home which for him, at least, had been a happy one.

On the threshold his master paused once and looked back. It had been a poor place indeed, bare, cold, cheerless in winter; in summer scorched by the heat from the zinc roof above its rafters. He had known in it hunger, want, torturing anxiety; all the lurking cares of the poor man, never sure when he rises of his bread for the day. But here he had been free; here he had owed nothing to any man; here he had been master of his fate; here he had come and gone as he chose, subject to no command, working for every crust he ate, for every thread he wore. And here the child had been with him, absolutely his own.

He retraced his steps across the narrow floor, and knelt for a moment by the little trestle bed on which Max had slept; he pressed his lips on the rude pillow where the fair head of the boy had rested so many nights. Then, with a last effort, he wrenched himself from the place. He would never again have a home.

At the foot of the staircase he met the old porteress of the house, who was crying.

'It is a fine change of fortune for you,' she said, seeing the alteration in his clothes. 'But for me, I shall miss that white-faced gentle child all the days of my life to come.'

'You were good to him,' said Roscoff, pointing to the packet he carried. 'I have taken only his few toys and little books. Everything else I had is left. It is worth very little; they are only rags and sticks, but whatever there be is yours. You were good to Max.'

He left her and hastened into the street, the dog pressing close to his feet.

Good fortune? Yes, such good fortune as has the prisoner who is assured of food and lodging and

raiment for all the years of his life, but who will never be free any more!

He left his old quarter by the Rue de Varennes, entered the Rue de Rivoli, and descended the Champs-Elysées and the Avenue de la Grande-Armée. Pepin followed closely, but without enjoyment or animation. With that sensitiveness which dogs possess as to the moral state of those to whom they belong, a sensitiveness as intense and as unaccountable as that of the photographic plate, the little terrier knew that his master was unhappy and that his playmate Max was lost. But even the acuteness of feeling of Pepin was not acute enough to let him foresee all his own impending woes.

Arrived at the end of the Avenue de Neuilly, he crossed the bridge and struck away a little from the high roads, the boulevards, the modern villas and the building grounds laid waste, and went somewhat farther to the south-west, where a portion of the old royal wood still existed, and a farm or two still gave it the aspect of that true country which it had all been when the Duc d'Orléans met his cruel end. To one of these farms Roscoff took his

way, Pepin beside him unquiet, vaguely alarmed, curious with that agitated sense of a dog conscious that some change is about to take place of which he has been told nothing. Leaving him outside the gate, his master went within and conversed with the mistress of the homestead, whom he had known in earlier days. After a while, he came out and called the dog.

It was a small farm, but green, pleasant, prosperous, a few of the old forest giants of Neuilly standing in its meadows and by its byres. Roscoff fastened a piece of string to the collar of his little friend, and gave the string into the farmwife's hand.

'Be kind to him,' he said hoarsely. 'He is as good as gold, and he has been with me nine years.'

'Poor dog, poor dog!' said the housewife; 'why will they not let you keep him where you go?'

'Because prisoners may have no pets, and a dog is the abhorrence of the bourgeois soul,' said Roscoff bitterly. 'Be good to him, for pity's sake, and I will come as often as I can.'

Then he hurried out of the house and through the little garden, hearing the struggles and the screams of Pepin, whose every note of anguish struck him to the soul with a stab of shame and of remorse.

Poor little faithful dog, cast among strangers! He lifted his arms in the air and shook his closed fists at the glistening steep roofs of the Institute of Mont Parnasse, which rose in the distance above the blue haze of the suburb where henceforth his life was to be spent.

The howling and wailing of his abandoned friend died at last off his ears as he strode rapidly onward with a sick heart and a stung conscience. 'Oh, heartless, brutal tyrants!' he thought. 'To make me forsake and pain a good little creature like that!'

He had begged, entreated, implored to be allowed to have the dog with him; had promised that it should be no trouble, no expense; had pleaded that it was an old friend and would be wretched without him; a council of wise men, represented by their secretary and manager, is not

likely to be moved by such childish arguments, and all his supplications had been rejected with a *non possumus* short and irrevocable as that of the Vatican. When a committee has framed a table of rules, these rules have in its eyes received a divine imprimatur, and are as sacred as seemed the tables of the Law to Moses.

Roscoff went on his solitary way until the high bronze gates of the Institute were before him, frowning down upon the dusty road and the metal lines of the tramway which passed along it. He rang and was admitted.

'You have no dog?' said the porter suspiciously. He had received orders from his superiors.

'No,' said Roslin. 'In the prisons they allow a poor devil a rat or a mouse if he tame one, but here I suppose, as we have all done no wrong, we must not be pampered by even so much indulgence as that.'

The porter, who was deaf, caught indistinctly the words 'rat' and 'mouse,' and answered indignantly:

'There are no vermin here—a modern house

with all modern improvements!—for what do you take us, monsieur? Wait, wait, wait! I must announce you to the manager.'

But Roscoff, who had the habit of walking quickly, having carried so many parcels so many years, was already within the glass doors of the Institute when the manager of Mont Parnasse came forward and met him.

'You have no dog?' he said suspiciously. 'Ah, I am glad that you were reasonable. Have you sent your little beast to the Fourrière?'

'Content yourself that he is not here,' replied Roscoff, with hauteur. 'That is all which concerns you.'

'What an insufferable person!' thought the manager, and said aloud, 'Allow me to show you your chamber. I am sure you will be happy here if you will only cultivate the proper spirit.'

'What may that be?' said Roscoff.

The manager, who was not accustomed to define, hesitated, coughed, looked a little angrily through the glass doors at the unfinished gardens.

'Contentment—compliance—self-restraint—ap-

preciation of the efforts made——' he murmured, a little ill at ease.

'The courtier's spirit, eh? The supple knee, the pliant back, the sugary tongue? The cringing, carneying, fawning, deceiving spirit, eh? Ah, my good sir, I am an old man—too old to learn—and my knees and my back are all stiff, and my tongue has never lied. What a loss for me! What can I do? I cannot go to school.'

The manager coloured with wrath. 'Be so good as to come to your room,' he said blandly, whilst he thought: 'Why in heaven's name could Valbranche send us this mangy, scowling, growling bear? Valbranche is a man of the world if anyone is.'

'I am a bear, yes,' said the old man, divining the unspoken thought as usual. 'But I have never been able to dance, alas!'

The official discreetly appeared not to hear, and showed the way up the grand staircase, down a wide corridor, and opened one in a number of doors, all exactly alike and lettered with gilt numerals.

'This is your bedroom,' he said, pushing open

the door. 'The meals are all taken in the large rooms downstairs. I hope this will suit your taste in every way.'

It was a good chamber: the paper a cold grey, the bed of pale-blue enamelled iron, the furniture of maple wood; the draperies grey, like the walls; the floor of encaustic tiles, with a small grey-and-blue carpet in the centre. On a brass nail hung a copy of the rules of the establishment; underneath them was the white china knob of an electric bell. It was like a room in a modern hotel; in a temperance hotel. The solitary window looked on a blank wall.

The manager glanced upward to see if the newcomer was impressed by the orderliness, neatness, and cleanliness of the whole; but he could tell nothing from Roscoff's countenance.

'Your luggage has not yet come, I believe? There is a closet on purpose for boxes,' he said tentatively as he pointed to a curtained alcove.

'I have no luggage at all,' said Roscoff, putting down on the table the parcel of Max's toys. 'I have nothing but the clothes which you see, which were

given me by Monsieur Valbranche. The room does well enough. For the last ten years I have lived in a garret, and slept on sacking.'

'Dear, dear me!' murmured the official, much shocked. 'Such things as these may be—are, no doubt—but decent people do not speak of them.'

'Eh, my good sir?' cried Roscoff, resisting a passionate inclination to take the prim Philistine by the throat and shake him. 'Do you suppose that men who can sleep on down, under a satin coverlet, and drink Mouton-Rothschild with their roast pheasant, come *here*?'

The manager, too shocked to remain, left the chamber hurriedly. 'That old wretch has mistaken the road,' he thought. 'It is to the Bicêtre that he should go, if not to the Mazas!'

A noble institute, created on the finest scale, and inspired by the finest motives, to be spoken of as if it were some loathed refuge of the lowest classes! The manager, to whom it paid a salary of twelve thousand francs a year, with 'logement, cuisine, éclairage, chauffage, et service' gratis,

went down the stairs oppressed by the immensity of the ingratitude of man.

'When a man is an ingrate one has said everything!' he declared a week later to Valbranche, who replied with his usual cheerful cynical philosophy:

'All men are ingrates, especially when they have nothing more to expect! But this one was, in his time, a man of genius; such people are privileged.'

'The genius was very long ago,' the manager said, with a sneer.

'Michelangelo was very long ago, and Apelles still longer, and yet——' replied Valbranche, with a laugh; and the official understood that the last pensioner of the Mont Parnasse was to be respected. And Valbranche was one of the most powerful and capable of the directors on the council; he made fine weather and foul at his pleasure even for managers.

Left alone on that first day of his arrival, the first act of Roscoff was to throw off his coat and strip off his waistcoat; then he sank down in a

chair, dropped his head on his hands, and sobbed like a child. He felt as completely a prisoner as though he had been actually carried to that Mazas which the manager thought should have received him.

And Max? And Pepin?

Were they not as unhappy as he? Was not his self-sacrifice all in vain? Valbranche had insisted that he should not see the child for a fortnight, so as not to disturb him in his new home too early, but he felt sure that the tender-hearted little lad was wretched: as wretched as the terrier straining at the chain in the farmhouse kitchen.

'My little Max! My little Max!' he said a score of times, whilst the big tears rolled through the bony fingers of his clasped hands.

Time went by, whether minutes, or hours, or days, he could not have told, when a sharp rapping at his bolted door aroused him.

'What do you want?' he asked without moving.

'Did you not hear the bell, sir? The manager sent me to say that you must go to dinner,' replied a voice through the keyhole.

'I want no dinner. Begone!'

'But you must dine, sir. Everyone dines together, sir.'

'I have no appetite, I tell you, get you gone!'

The attendant continued to implore, but in vain. Roscoff would not move. They went to dinner without him, and he to bed without having broken his fast in this house, where four men-cooks with their scullions were at work in the modern model kitchen to prepare nourishment for the pensioners of Mont Parnasse, and for those greater people, the officials and the servants.

In the morning it was intimated to him that it was hoped he would not again sulk like this; absence from meals was not liked, indeed not permitted, except in the case of genuine illness, certified as such by the physician of the establishment.

'Even the animals in the Jardin des Plantes are allowed the option of eating their rations or leaving them,' replied the ingrate. 'But, I understand, we are less than they; they are all more or less rare, men who are poor are so common.

The secretary, who had been deputed to make him understand that a charitable institute expected him to consume what it was good enough to provide, was as shocked as the manager would have been, and withdrew, reflecting that maisons de santé had advantages which charitable institutes did not possess; in the former they could when expedient employ strait waistcoats, iced douches, and other methods of persuasion.

'I will go and visit Pepin,' thought Roscoff when he was left alone.

He could only see the dead wall in front of his window, but he could tell the sun was shining. He had not eaten since noon the day before, but he was used to fasting, and he had drunk some water out of the glass jug on the centre table.

He took his hat and went down into the hall. He had his pipe lighted in his mouth; a head servant stopped him respectfully.

'I beg your pardon, sir, but did you not read the rules? No smoking is allowed outside the *fumoir*.'

Roscoff swore a bad oath, and strode across the

hall, without even a glance at the clerk seated within the office.

'Your pipe was smelt last night, sir, and I was begged to draw your attention to the——'

'I am going out,' said Roscoff.

'Even in that case it is not allowed to light the pipe or cigar within doors. And I suppose, sir, you have announced your intention of going out at the bureau?'

'What bureau? Why should I?'

'It is one of the rules, sir. A copy of the rules is framed and hung up in every chamber. Whenever one of the inmates goes out for a walk he intimates his desire to do so at the office yonder, and if he also wishes to be out after five o'clock he must have leave to be so.'

'Am I to stop him?' whispered the house porter to the head servant who had spoken with this hoary rebel, and who hesitated, uncertain how to proceed.

'No, let him go for this once,' he said at length. 'I will report to the manager. He will prevent the recurrence of such an act of insubordination.'

'What filthy tobacco the old fellow smokes!

Who was he, do you know? A painter? He looks more like a *loup de mer* from Cancale or the Ile d'Oléron.'

And he looked contemptuously after the figure of Roscoff, which had, indeed, never lost that look of the sea-dog which had been common to all his race through so many generations. He had lived on the great and gracious city, but he had never been of it.

He had never taken kindly to the artificial wants and wadded trammels of luxurious and polished life, as had done so many of his contemporaries brought up like himself on black bread and in smoky cabins.

'For women, all those!' he had used to say with good-humoured scorn when he saw the Oriental stuffs, the Persian brasses, the Russian skin rugs, the Indian silverwork, and the ivories, bronzes, tapestries, satins, silks, and hothouse plants of his comrades' ateliers in the fashionable quarters, warmed with their hot air and scented by their burnt perfumes. When he had been master of a big breezy barnlike room with a fine north light, and no one to

disturb him in his work, he had been owner of all which he desired. Luxury had always worried, bothered, suffocated him. For the first fifteen years of his life he had run barefoot in all weathers on the sand and rocks, and through the boiling surf and shallow salt sea pools.

Even in the days when he had been *cher maître* to a crowd of admiring students, and rich men had eagerly disputed the possession of his smallest canvas, he had always remained in appearance much what his forefathers had looked before him: rude, tall, broad-shouldered, bearded men, used to do battle with wind and wave in snow and storm.

He went now outside the gates of the Institute with a fiery wrath seething in his soul. It was the first time in his life that he had ever been ordered to obey. All his blood was hot within his veins when age had not even yet taught it to run sluggishly and calmly under provocation.

The rules! the rules!

Rich people, free people, know the fretting irritation of bylaws and regulations in their hotels and clubs, which they are at liberty to leave whensoever

it pleases them. But when these prohibitions are pins stuck firmly in the smarting flesh, threads strong as ropes like those which held helpless Gulliver, then none can measure their power to torture, or exaggerate their capability of driving a sane man into crime or into insanity.

'Courage, courage! they are only trifles,' he told himself as he walked down the high road. 'One must cultivate the proper spirit, as that menial said last night.'

He had got but a few yards down the road, not too far off to have lost sight of the great staring white house which was his prison, when there came quickly towards him the running figure of a woman, in whom he recognised Jeanne Gervais, the farmer's wife, with whom he had left Pepin.

'The dog!' he cried out before she could reach him.

'Oh, my good Roscoff!' she cried in answer. 'I came to tell you we put him in an outhouse with a good bed of straw and some nice supper, for in the kitchen my man could not bear his howling; it was all fastened up, was the shed, safe and sound, but

this morning when we went to take him some bread, lo! he was gone; he had gnawed and scratched a hole in the door; the splinters and slivers were all lying about, and he must have squeezed himself through the hole he made and got off. I came to see; he is not with you?'

Roscoff gave an exclamation, half an oath, half a sigh.

'He is gone to Paris, no doubt, poor little soul; gone home; it was his home all his life, that garret in the Temple.'

'Why did you put him in the shed?' he added furiously. 'Could you not be faithful a little while, a single day? You promised to keep him beside you.'

'But, my dear good creature,' said the woman, trembling, 'I am not alone in the house, as you know. My husband and my sons could not stand his cries; they work hard, they want to sleep in peace; besides, the shed was fastened up tight. How could we tell a little beast could saw with his teeth like any carpenter with his tools? Come and see yourself how he did it.'

'I must go to the city; he may have been taken up by the police; dogs are hunted like vermin.'

And he left her, and turned to retrace his steps and cross the Seine on his way back to Paris. She ran after him, half crying.

'When you find him bring him back to us. We will take better care——'

But he went on his way, not heeding her or not hearing. His heart was sore for his little lost comrade. When he reached his old home Pepin had not been seen there. Where was the little dog? How could he be traced? Where might he not have wandered? He got leave to sit awhile in the old porteress's den and wait to see if he came. His garret had been let at once to another tenant, a chimney-sweeper with his family.

'If he come here you will take care of him?' he asked of the porteress, after vainly waiting some time.

She promised that she would.

He went to the Fourrière. The dog had not been taken thither. Tired out and footsore and heart-sick, Roscoff toiled back to the faubourg of the Temple. It was his fixed idea that there would

Pepin go. When he reached the door the old woman called out:

'Aie! aie! If you only had stayed! He came in two hours ago all dusty and frightened, and ran up to the garret, but the people who are there drove him out with a broom, and he would not stop for me, but smelling and smelling all down the stairs and along the passages—at the scent of your footsteps, I suppose—went out again into the street, and I was not quick enough to stop him. I did all I could, but you know I am rheumatic and slow. If I were you I would go back whence I came; you may be sure he has followed your steps.'

'Poor little soul!' muttered Roscoff, and tired as he was and exhausted, for he had only eaten a crust and a bit of sausage bought for four sous in one of the streets, he turned back and began the return journey to Neuilly. The long day had now drawn to a close. To go on foot across Paris and to and from its different quarters, takes time even for a hardy pedestrian.

It was a fine evening.

Roscoff went, as he had so often done, through

the press of carriages and carts and omnibuses and all the hurrying foot passengers of the streets, alone in the crowd with his burden of sorrow, as we are each of us alone through life. Strong as he was and used to toil, he was very tired when he passed out of the Place de l'Etoile. He knew not where else to seek for the dog. He had no money with which to advertise for Pepin or pay a reward for him if found; even had he been at the Fourrière he would have been unable to discharge the fines to liberate him unless he had obtained them from some one's charity. For it is a great crime for a poor man to have a dog; it is, indeed, considered quite treason-felony in every state, and no occasion is ever missed of punishing the offence as it deserves.

Roscoff walked slowly; the trains of the tram cars rushed past him, the wind stirred in the trees; now and then he was met and looked at sharply by one of the police. The stars shone overhead; he knew nothing about them, but he loved them with an artist's love, more tender, if less intelligent, than the astronomer's. He glanced up at the great sun which is called in human language the star Altair;

he had read in a newspaper that Altair draws nearer and nearer to the earth with every year, and that in the end—not so very far off—entering this solar system will pour down upon our planet an unbearable effulgence of light, an insupportable intensity of heat, in which all sentient life will faint or perish, and draw a burning earth, a dead moon, and a conquered sun into its own mightier sphere of flame.

Roscoff looked up at it when it shone, the brightest jewel in its constellation.

'Well,' he thought, 'if you came now you would not come too soon. The earth has lived long enough, and in all its cycles mankind has found nought to do but to quarrel, persecute, and slay.'

Then his eyes fell again on the dusty ground, and he trudged on; his head sank on his breast, his tired feet dragged along like leaden weights.

As he drew near the end of the avenue of the Grande Armée, he heard a scuffling, panting sound in his rear, and, breathless from fatigue and mad with joy, the little yellow terrier leapt up about his knees.

"Why, my little man! My poor faithful little man! Have you found me out at last?' cried Roscoff, the tears starting to his eyes as he embraced the dog. 'Well, I will not go to the Institute to-night. It would be too base to desert you after such fidelity. We will go and sleep out together, Pepin, in the fresh air. It will not be the first time we have done so.'

Pepin jumped about him still delirious with joy.

Roscoff went away from the highways and across the fields; he knew all the ground about Neuilly, and knew where a remnant of the old royal park was to be found, a leafy solitude as yet unpurchased for building, although boards were set up around it announcing in large letters, '*Terrain à vendre en lots ou en bloc.*'

Whether because the price demanded was too high, or because the building mania had spent itself for a while in the suburbs, no one had bought these dozen hectares of old park land, and it was undisturbed in its woodland stillness except by children coming into it for nuts or primroses or birds' nests, and in winter time a poacher with intent to set a gin

for a snow-famished hare or shoot a jay or a thrush when their wings were stiff with frost. Roscoff had come hither twice or thrice with little Max in the summer time; he knew an old hollow oak with room for half a dozen men within its hoary bosom, and went thither with the dog. The night was cool but cloudless; the fragrance of grass and wild flowers was in the air; there was no keeper or gendarme to ask his right there. He sat down by the old oak and lit his pipe, and broke up for Pepin the remains of the bread he had bought in the city. The little dog, who had had no food for twenty-four hours, ate eagerly, and lapped the water of a small spring which ran under the mosses.

'*Ah! la clef des champs!*' said his master, half aloud. 'What key is there which opens to so much pleasure? No golden key can compare with it.'

The stillness, the dewy quiet, the smell of the leaves and the grass and the wild thyme, recalled to him so many peaceful days before the war, when he had passed entire months in the woods around Paris, sleeping out of doors with a plaid thrown over his colour box for a pillow. He smoked on, and the

night grew darker and the planets and stars larger, and the innumerable small sounds of insect life grew clearer. He became drowsy, and stretched himself full length inside the shelter of the oak trunk, the little dog creeping up close to his breast and going sound asleep with a sigh of joy.

'Poor little faithful soul!' murmured Roscoff. 'Does our Max remember like you?'

Max was at that moment asleep too, in a pretty white bed, a happy smile on his face, and his hand holding fast a little clockwork steamboat gaily painted, which had been given him that afternoon.

Roscoff slept soundly, like the dog, as he had not been able to sleep in the prim, orderly, grey and blue chamber at Mont Parnasse. He was like an old lion who has escaped from a menagerie and enjoys a brief freedom in the fields before he is recaptured. The rays of the sun striking on the oak awoke him. He stared at the morning light, looked at Pepin nestled close to him, remembered, shivered, sighed, and arose from his too brief repose.

'Poor Pepin,' he said to the dog; 'the day is here. Your misery and mine begin once more.'

Pepin, who had thought that they had come to live for the rest of their lives in the hollow of the oak tree, amongst the leaves and the birds, glanced sideways at him apprehensively and began to clean his dusty broken-haired coat.

'You can make a toilette, my little friend: I cannot,' said Roscoff, becoming aware that the smart new clothes given by Valbranche were in a sorry condition from the dust of the day in Paris, and the dews and damp of his couch within the hollow tree.

'So best,' he thought. 'They will be less tiresome when they are shabby.'

Then he shook himself as Pepin did, and rose to leave the pleasant shelter of the leaves. What was Max doing, he wondered—crying, pining, sobbing out his little prayers?

Max in that moment was eating his breakfast of milk and coffee, of jam and bread, with a hearty appetite, making his little clockwork *mouche* run up and down on the tablecloth, which he made believe was the Seine.

'My poor little dog, we must part and go to

our respective prisons,' said Roscoff. He longed as the dog longed to spend the rest of the day, and all the days of the rest of his life, in liberty amongst these trees, under this blue sky, but he had given his word. He was forced to return, as a prisoner on parole is drawn back by the invisible force of that sentiment which we call honour. Valbranche had kept his share of the bond; Roscoff would not be behind him in observation of his part.

He took Pepin back to the farm, where the woman welcomed him cordially, but the man and his sons looked askance at both the terrier and his master.

'He will get reconciled in time,' he said apologetically, 'and I will come and take him for a walk this afternoon, and twice every day, without fail. Pray, pray be good to him.'

And poor Pepin was tied up under a bench, and looked up in his master's face with humid, heart-broken, beseeching eyes which plainly said, 'Is this all my reward for my fidelity?'

'Alas! *mon ami*,' murmured Roscoff, answering the reproach, 'men have no rewards for fidelity,

for it is not a virtue in their own code; it is an imbecility.'

Then again with the dog's frantic cries in his ear he went away, and took his road to the Institute.

The porter opened the gates, casting a scandalised and scornful glance on the state of his clothes, wet with dew and stained with the marks of moss and mould: the officials within let him go unchallenged to his room, where he washed and brushed his hair and beard, and the new garments, which would never look new any more.

He had scarcely made himself decent when some one rapped at his door, and without waiting for permission the manager entered the chamber. He wore a pained, shocked, half-apologetic and half-condemnatory expression.

'My dear sir!' he began, and paused.

Roscoff went on brushing his coat and proffered no syllable to assist the difficulties of the official's discourse.

'You were out all night,' the manager said with a cough.

'I was,' said Roscoff; and added with his short

caustic laugh, 'I suppose at my age you have no fear for my morals?'

'Oh!' said the official with a little puzzled smile, 'of course we—it is not that—we are not so indiscreet. But it is absolutely necessary that the rules of this establishment should be observed by all: we can make no exceptions.'

'Of course you cannot, but need you make any rules?'

The manager stared.

'Regulations are needful in every establishment, and adherence to them must be requested and enforced.'

'Eh,' said Roscoff roughly, 'there need be none here. It is not a madhouse, nor a state gaol, nor a reformatory, nor a hospital; all your inmates are sane, they have broken no law, they are even persons who have deserved well of their generation if they did not get their deserts; why should you dictate the ordering of their lives to them?'

'They are persons who have failed,' thought the official, with contempt. 'Or, if they once succeeded they failed to utilise success and turn it

into coupons and Consols. What can be less worthy of encouragement than such improvidence?'

Aloud, he recited the stock phrases of the *bourgeois* morality: observance of regular hours, punctuality at meals, good example to servants, excellence of proper habits, due respect of stipulations and authority. When he paused to take breath after the litany, Roscoff gave again his short, disconcerting laugh.

'Eh, we are paupers? Do not gild the pill. Thrust it down our throats with a horse drench!'

'It is no fault of mine,' said the manager, moved out of his bland superiority. 'The Committee made the rules. I am only here to see that they are observed, Now allow me to point out to you, M. Roscoff, that in the short space of twenty-four hours you have broken them all.'

'Really!' said Roscoff. 'I am afraid I am capable of breaking them again in a still shorter space of time. What would you? I told you yesterday I was too old to go to school.'

'But you are not too old to go down to meals, or to smoke in the room appointed for smoking,

or to sleep in your bed,' said the younger man, with impatience.

'I cannot eat in public,' said Roscoff, grinding his teeth, still white and strong; 'and I shall go out when it pleases me.'

The manager drew an envelope from his pocket. 'I was to give you this if my own arguments failed.'

Roscoff recognised the handwriting of Valbranche on the thick cream envelope, and opened it in silence. The note ran thus:

'My excellent friend,—You are an honourable man. Is it honourable towards me and the dead Brothers Firmin-Fuchs to take their benefits, and in return set an example of insubordination and ingratitude in their Institute? I put and leave the question to your own conscience and good feeling. The little one is well and happy, and, if you do not worry him by visits, will in a week be perfectly reconciled. I have seen him myself, and took him a toy.

'Always, *cher maître*, yours devotedly,

'MAURICE VALBRANCHE.'

Roscoff, under his brown, hale skin, grew deadly pale as he read the letter. The official watched him with the demure, catlike contentment with which the small soul always watches the pangs of the great soul. Roscoff felt that his countenance showed his emotion, but he could not for the moment control or conceal it. He turned away to the window that the manager might not see his face. He was silent so long, looking down upon the letter, that his visitor lost patience.

'I presume that M. Valbranche will not write in vain? His arguments will be more potent than mine,' he said, with a scarcely veiled insolence.

Roscoff swung round from the embrasure of the window.

'M. Valbranche does not tell me that, in return for my board and lodging, I am to put up with the impertinence of salaried underlings!' he said, in a voice of thunder. 'My room is not to be invaded at your pleasure. The rules of the Committee I will obey if it be necessary that I should do so; but if you come hither unbidden, I shall appeal to the Board.'

He spoke with that passion, that authority, that hauteur, which seemed to the other man as intolerable, as inexcusable in him, as though he were a beggar out of the streets; and for the moment his enemy was cowed. He did not know what might be the contents of the letter from Valbranche, and, deeming discretion the better part of valour, he muttered some words which Roscoff scarcely heard, and left the chamber.

Alone, Roscoff reread the note, so cruel in its courtesy, so irresistible in the ingenuity of appeal.

Valbranche was a skilled reader of the human heart, and, though he had no fine chords in his own, he knew how to touch and awaken response from them when they existed in the hearts of others.

'Oh, little Max, little Max!' murmured Roscoff. 'The dog is a higher creature than you if this note say aright. And I must obey these gaolers for your sake!'

When noon struck, and the gong in the central hall sounded the hour of breakfast, he went downstairs and into the dining-room with a strange,

novel, miserable sense of timidity and embarrassment upon him. In his richest and brightest years he had never been a sociable man; he had always led his own life, apart from the world in general; he had been always one of the people, always a Breton sea-dog at heart and in all his ways. Except with some unconventional artists like himself, he had never in his life sat at a meal with other men, and the extreme poverty of the last twenty years of his existence had made him eat, as he lived, in absolute solitude and with the rude, barbaric ways which solitude and poverty beget. It was torture to him to go into the midst of strangers.

The dining-room was a hall with wood panelling and a grained ceiling; it was imposing, fine, richly furnished; the architect, decorators, and upholsterers of Mont Parnasse had put every grand thing they could think of into the building, that their profits might be the larger. It looked like a church to Roscoff.

The manager advanced with smiling cordiality. 'Welcome to our table, M. Roscoff,' he said amiably.

'I hope you bring a good appetite with you; it is the best sauce, as some English poet has said.'

Roscoff advanced—awkward, confused, ill at ease—and seated himself on the edge of the chair which was pointed out to him. There were sixteen persons, including the manager and secretary, at the large oval table, with its white damask, its silver and glass, its flowers in bowls of old Rouen china. The whole sixteen looked curiously and with a nascent hostility at Roscoff; it was the same look as dogs give to another dog strange and stray.

He himself was furious to feel his own embarrassment; he, whose sturdy independence had never bent before any man, to be intimidated by the mere sight of plate and linen and the gaze of strangers! He had forgotten the usages of polite custom, he had almost forgotten what a fork or a napkin was used for; he had so long had only a clasp-knife with which to eat his poor meal at a corner of his deal table, and a pewter spoon with which to take his onion soup when he was fortunate enough to have any. The stare of all those eyes turned on him took away the appetite which, after such long

fasting, he naturally felt, despite his discomfort. In vain his right-hand neighbour, an old composer of music, to whom his name was well known and who had been a contemporary of his, tried to break the ice and draw him into conversation. He only replied by some inaudible, ungracious sound. The others were all talking, laughing some of them, discussing the news of the day, applauding the manager's wit; but Roscoff could neither speak nor listen, and the food, good though it was, seemed to choke him as he forced himself to swallow it—it was the food of charity.

He felt, too, that he was uncouth, uncivilised, unlike those around him; they were now poor people also, but they were people who had remained within the pale of polished conventional custom; he had been long outside of it: so long that he had forgotten its ways and its accents.

He rose before anyone else; before the manager had given the signal to rise; and left the table and the hall without a word to anyone.

'What a bear!' said one of the inmates who had been a journalist and had no more title to be in

the Institute than if he had been a chimney-sweeper.

'To see him eat is an absolute illness,' murmured a gentleman who had in his time written pretty little pastorals and proverbs for the stage, and had been a favourite of the Empress at Compiègne.

'Messieurs,' said the composer of music who had been the contemporary of Roscoff, 'if this building be a refuge for men of genius, no one comes hither with higher title to its asylum than Pierre Roscoff possesses.'

The remark cast a chill over the assembled inmates of Mont Parnasse; some of them had been men of talent, none of them had been men of genius, and they knew it.

But they soon shook off the unflattering sensation.

'Genius should eat in its own cage as the lions do,' said, with a polite sneer, the poet of eclogues and idylls who had been a favourite at Compiègne.

'I am very sorry, messieurs, if you have suffered any inconvenience, but the rules——' said the manager, dipping his fingers into his crystal bowl of rose water.

The days following fell into a dreary routine. They resembled each other with an unvarying monotony.

Twice in every day he was compelled to support the torment of eating in public. Twice in every day he went and took little Pepin for a walk, and kept him out for hours, no matter what the weather, as the only mitigation of the dog's captivity and his own which it was in his power to give.

But for these long days passed in the fields or woods, or on the farms, to solace Pepin, he would have found existence unbearable. He made no acquaintances; throughout dinner and breakfast he was dumb; his embarrassment never wore off; he never grew reconciled in any way or degree to the observation of the other inmates, or to the surveillance and interference, which were greater in his excited fancy than they actually were.

But each time that he went out he had to announce his intention at the office; and each time that he wanted to smoke his strong tobacco at night he had to go to the smoking-room, with its leathern couches and its silver-plated spittoons, and its

electric lights, where it seemed to him that even his old black short pipe—the friend of so many years—had no flavour and could give no comfort.

He chafed unceasingly in his splendid gaol, as his little terrier chafed in the shed at the end of a chain.

The old composer and one or two others endeavoured to enter into some kind of intercourse with him, but he resented and resisted their efforts, believing there was a concealed ridicule beneath them. Generally even they let him alone, and he was known in the community as the Hedgehog.

He tried to his uttermost to conform to the regulations of the place, and to conquer the stubborn and stiff-necked impatience and independence of his natural temper. But he could not always succeed, and he frequently gave cause for offence. He was disliked by everyone, from the servants whom he could not fee, to the talented persons sheltered there by the benevolence of the Firmin-Fuchs, for whose past and whose pretensions he showed an injudicious and unconcealed contempt. He was deemed morose

when he was only miserable, and a churl when he was only full of sorrow and his withers wrung by loss of liberty.

A harassing and remorseful doubt was also perpetually at work within him. Was this sacrifice, so bitter to himself, really for the good of the child for whom it was made?

At the end of the first month he had gone, as agreed, to visit Max at school.

The house where the little boy had been placed was near the Jardin des Plantes, inclosed in large grounds, very sunny, bright, and attractive: a home for the offspring of gentlefolk.

He was shown into a small study, and begged to wait. 'Monsieur Max,' they said, would be sent to him very shortly. He had brought with him Pepin, who, quivering all over with delighted expectation, seemed to know whom he was about to see again.

The door opened.

'Monsieur Max,' said a servant.

Max was clad in a blouse and knickerbockers of pale blue washing silk; he had a white sash round

his waist; his pretty curls shone in the sun; his face was already less thin, and had more colour. Valbranche had said to his tutoress, 'Dress him well, spare no cost; make him happy and strong.' And she, fully believing that he was the natural child of this wealthy and powerful person, obeyed the injunction carefully and liberally.

The child stood hesitating on the threshold with surprise, some pleasure, and more apprehension succeeding on his mobile features.

'Grandfather and Pepin!' he cried in wonder, while the little dog whirled round him in ecstasy, uttering short sharp barks of rapture and recognition.

Roscoff had never been demonstrative with the child, but he pressed him to his breast violently, and kissed him with a silent force of passion which terrified Max.

'You are happy, my little man?' asked Roscoff wistfully, longing, despite himself, for a denial.

'Yes,' said Max without hesitation. 'It is very nice here, all play, and so much to eat! Why did not you live like this, grandfather?'

'You will know when you are older,' said Roscoff, evasively. 'You do not ever wish to come back to the garret, eh, Max?'

'Oh, no!' said the child; and a little quick chilly shudder ran through him from head to foot. 'I wish you were with us here,' he added caressingly.

'You are better without me,' said Roscoff abruptly, repressing a harsher reply which rose to his lips.

'But you are not in the garret either, are you?'

'No, my dear; I am in a fine house.'

'I am glad of that.'

The child's eyes were looking up at him with the terrible, merciless, searching scrutiny of childhood, and in those uplifted eyes, which were not fond, but meditative and critical, Roscoff read his unspoken thoughts, which were: 'How old you are! How rough you look! You are not like the papas and grandpapas of my playfellows, who are all so polished and nice to look at, and come in carriages, and have beautiful varnished boots and sweet scents on their linen; why are you so different?'

'You are a little aristocrat already, Max!' said

Roscoff bitterly, feeling the sting of that dissatisfied scrutiny deep down into his innermost being.

'Tell me,' whispered Max softly—'they ask me so often—who am I? I don't know what to say. They all know who they are.'

'You are Maximilian Roscoff,' said the old man.

'Yes, I know,' answered the child. 'But what else? Who else?'

'You mean are you noble?' said Roscoff with a harsh laugh. 'Well, tell them my nobility is writ on canvas in the Luxembourg, and your father died fighting for France against the Pavillons-Noirs. That is nobility enough for anybody.'

'Yes,' said Max doubtfully.

The nobility which he was beginning dimly to understand was one which had coronets on carriage panels and liveried servants to take you to and fro.

'You have little of us in you,' thought his grandfather, gazing at the fragile, nervous grace of the child. Max was, and would be, like his mother—a pale, frail, slender Parisienne, with an excitable brain, a blood half water, half fire, and a ceaseless

thirst for pleasure which she had no physical force to support.

Pepin, thinking himself too little noticed, jumped on his old comrade Max and scratched and whined for a response.

Max took his rough little head in his hands and kissed it, but called out in dismay, for Pepin's dusty little pads had made some ugly marks on the pale blue blouse.

'Are you a *petit maître* already?' said Roscoff impatiently. 'Neither Pepin nor I are fine enough for you now.'

'Oh, I love Pepin,' said Max with remorse, coaxing his old friend tenderly. 'But he is—he is—a little dirty and shabby, is he not?' Madame's poodle here is so beautifully white and pink and *frisé*, and he does so many tricks, and he will answer to four languages, and beg for sugar. Oh, you should see him!'

'Pepin has no accomplishments, and I have no nobility, Max,' said Roscoff, amused but wounded. 'We can only love you, my little man; and what use is that?'

He went away from the child's presence with a thorn in his breast. Max, he realised, was as much lost to him as though the boy were dead. The gulf between them could only widen, could never close.

'You have done what I never asked or wished. You have overdone it!' he said, with passionate reproach, a few days later to Valbranche. 'You are nurturing a poor penniless child as if he were heir to millions. That is not the school for Max. You will ruin him. You will give him tastes, notions, habits, desires, fancies, which are not of his class, and which, as he grows older, he will have no means to supply or to gratify. Oh, God help me if I did wrong in giving up the child to you!'

Valbranche laughed, half provoked, half diverted

'Bah, *mon vieux*! Why so tragic?' he said, with impatient good nature. 'I do a thing well if I do it at all. I will make the boy a journalist and a millionaire if he prove intelligent. Get out with you, please. I am busy.'

'He will be a *déclassé*!' said Roscoff with

violence. 'There is no more wretched creature on our earth.'

'Oh, no! That depends,' said Valbranche, with his loud, cheerful laugh. 'I am certainly a *déclassé*, since I was the son of an opera dancer, as all the world knows, and she herself could not tell who was my father. But I have done very well, very well indeed. I would not change places with any crowned head.'

'You have two supreme qualities for attaining success,' cried Roscoff, with caustic brevity. 'They are complete unscrupulousness and immense self-love. I do not wish Max to have those qualities; I would rather see him in his grave.'

Valbranche eyed him half with admiration, half with derision. 'What an unwise, impolitic irreconcilable you are, my good friend!' he said, without taking offence. 'And, my friend, if you please, I am busy; and little Max is not the axis on which this globe turns, though you think he is. What an ingrate you are! Fie for shame!'

Roscoff went out of his presence feeling bitterly his own inability to do anything or avert anything;

he could only trust to the continuance of the charitable whim of this man, who was, alas! he thought, noted for his caprices and inconstancy.

'What will you be when you are a man?' asked Roscoff on one of his visits to his grandson: visits in which it became with every time more and more difficult to find any subject in common.

'Oh, a journalist, like M. Valbranche,' replied the child without hesitation. 'I will have my own journal, as he has, and have quantities of money, and send my horses to win great races, and make all Paris talk of me.'

'The modern ideal!' said Roscoff, with the permissible scorn of a man who had never ceased to believe in high ideals, although they had crumbled to ashes beneath him.

'I have written a story,' continued Max.

'You, baby! But you cannot even read!'

'No; but I told the story to Claire—that is, the *bonne* who has the little curls under her cap—and she wrote it down, and read it to the others, and they said it was good; even Madame said, too, it was good.'

'Aha! That is great honour. And what was it about, Max?'

'Oh, about a little boy who was shut up in a cave with an ogre, and had nothing to eat, and nothing to wear; and a beautiful fairy came in a chariot of gold, and brought a green melon, and cut the melon open, and scooped out the inside; and then made the little boy very small—small—small—and put him inside the two halves of the melon, and carried him off to an enchanted palace, where he became a man in a minute, and was crowned a king.'

Roscoff smiled bitterly.

'You versified your own sorrows and joys, like all poets, my dear.'

'What?' said Max, who did not understand.

'And you thought of me as the ogre, did you not?'

Max coloured, and was silent. He saw that he had made a mistake in relating his fairy tale. After a few moments he added timidly and courteously, innocently trying to mend matters:

'No, no, indeed! I did not mean that. You were always very good and kind, when——'

'When I was not otherwise,' said Roscoff, with his harshest laugh, which had already scared the child as a shy spaniel is scared by the crack of a whip.

Pepin, thinking there was some dissonance between these two human beings whom he loved, sat down on his little, worn, dusty tail, and howled.

Roscoff rose to go.

'The next time you revise the story, Max,' he said, 'make the little boy take his old faithful dog away with him in the melon rind to his palace of delight; as for the ogre, let the cave fall in on him.'

He had given himself into bondage for sake of this child, and the child's only gratitude was to turn him into ridicule in a fairy tale for the play-room!

He was, perhaps, unreasonably angered against Max for the lightness and ease with which the little boy turned from the old life and embraced the new. 'He can have no drop of our blood,' he said bitterly. The old seafaring race from which he himself sprang had been always so tenacious in memory, so clannish in loyalty. The springs of Roscoff's mind, like the sinews of his body, had stiffened, and lost with age the small amount of pliability which they had ever

possessed. He could find no sympathy for that which was so unlike himself and his race. He did not understand the unconsciousness of the child's egotism, the sheerly instinctive and unreasoned-on preferences which prompted his acts and his words. He could not comprehend that a child is, usually speaking, a little self-centred animal, full only of its physical needs and desires, and giving what is called its affections wherever these meet with the most gratification.

'Ah!' he thought savagely, 'why could not my son seek his mistress amongst our strong, rude, valiant, faithful sea folk; why must he beget his only offspring on a *drôlesse* of Paris, all nerves, follies, and disease?'

For good or for evil, he could not tell which, the child was gone from him, never more to dwell with him or to live his life. Would it not be best to make the sacrifice complete, to efface himself altogether, to cease to trouble the little selfish heart and faint conscience of the child by claims upon them which might invoke duty but could not awaken affection?

Roscoff had received no education and had given himself little, except in matters appertaining to his art. He felt that he was ignorant in much; that there were many things of which he could no more judge than if he were a savage of the Corea or Tierra del Fuego. It might be that the question of the child's fortune and fate was one of these. Could he presume to set up his opinion against that of a consummate man of the world like Valbranche, whose success in all he undertook proved the accuracy of his judgment? What could he have done for the child himself? Nothing; and at his age he might have left Max alone without a friend very soon, who could tell?

He felt that his strength was beginning to fail him.

If he had gone on in his old ways of life, with freedom, and such happiness as the child's presence and dependence on him had given, he might have felt no change in his health for many years. But the confinement of the Mont Parnasse, the constant irritation of the interference and detention there, the depression caused by its monotony and routine, the

mere difference of the food he now ate, of the hours he was now forced to keep, and the incessant effort required from him to subdue his natural temper and put constraint upon all his inclinations and discontinue the habits of long years, all united to cause him physical as well as mental injury, and slowly to undermine that robust and sea-born force which had resisted so long all toil, fatigue, and want.

The weeks became months, and the summer autumn, and the autumn winter, and winter once more spring, and time lost its meaning to Roscoff; it was one long, blurred, stupid, bead roll of colourless hours. There was only one point in it which stood out from the rest—it was the one day in each month on which he was permitted to see Max.

But that one was as joyless as the rest, and each visit brought closer home to him the fact of how entirely, how surely, the child was passing for ever out of his hold, out of his influence, how certainly with every succeeding week he became less and less in the boy's affections and in his memory.

'I knew how it would be,' said Roscoff to him-

self a hundred times. But he had not really known; he had always, in a corner of his credulous and tender heart, believed that little Max would not desert him, would not forget him, would not be won over away from him by sport and mirth and toys and fine clothes and soft beds and abundant food. He had always thought that a time would come when the little boy would throw his arms around him and cry, 'Take me away, oh, take me away! Let us be poor, but let us be free!' For Roscoff made a very common mistake: he thought that because his blood was in the veins of this child, therefore his instincts must be the child's instincts also. He waited in vain for any such time. Each month that he saw Max he found the boy stronger, rosier, healthier, more active, more agile, more childlike; but he found him also more distant from himself, more penetrated by new ideas and new fancies, more centred in his new wants, his new wishes, his new associates and habits, and moral atmosphere. He felt that if he ceased his visits he would soon be forgotten entirely by Max, and would it not be best that it should be so?

Should love ever ask remembrance as a tax-gatherer claims his dues?

'I am only an ogre to him,' he thought bitterly. 'The ogre of want and hunger and cold and privation; those are all with which I am associated in his thoughts. It is natural that it should be so. He knew them so often with me, alas!'

The day that he thought thus was one on which he was entitled to see Max: a cold, hard winter's day with a driving wind and a frost-bound earth. Roscoff had come on foot as usual, the little dog trotting beside him. It was early in the afternoon, and carriages and cabs and omnibuses were hurrying to their destinations; he had only his pair of legs to carry him, which were growing stiffer and slower than they had been even a year before, and his old rude, knotted stick to lean on, the stick at which Max had looked askance with deprecating glance.

Roscoff had not of late felt well, but he had never missed going out to see Pepin for several hours every day, wet or fine, no matter even how bad the weather was; and he had never missed one of the days on which it was allowed to him

to visit Max. But now as he walked the doubt came to him, would it not be better, wiser, kinder, to abstain altogether from recalling himself and the past to his son's little son? Max, a child of impressionable temperament and instinctive egotism, took his tone of thought and feeling from those about him, was susceptible of externals, and unable to appreciate sacrifice. He was a mere baby in some things, and had a precocious intelligence in others; physical comfort and ease were very delightful to him, and when he did remember the years passed with his grandsire it was with a shiver as of cold and of dread, as a child basking on some warm hearth by the fire may remember some night on which he was lost in the snow. Moreover, of this tall, gaunt, rough old man who came to see him, he was a little ashamed; Max knew now what a gentleman meant, and his grandfather was not a gentleman in the conventional sense of that word, and was living at some asylum for the poor on charity, public charity, so one of the little boys, his schoolfellow, older than himself, had found out and told him with undisguised scorn. All this was plainly

said in his wistful, critical gaze at Roscoff whenever they met, and made the meeting less and less welcome to both as each month came round.

The world, that subtle, magnetic, unkind divider of so many hearts, had glided invisible, but omnipotent, between the old man and the child.

When he reached the house where the child was at school, he requested the servant who admitted him to let him see the mistress of it before telling 'Monsieur Max' of his arrival. The lady came to him.

'Pardon me, madam,' said Roscoff, 'is there any way in which you could enable me to see my grandson without his seeing me to-day?'

'Why do you wish that?' she said with a smile. 'Do you doubt that he is happy?'

'You think he is happy?'

She smiled again. 'The happiest child here. For the others left happy homes, which they sometimes regret, but he—pardon me, M. Roscoff, I am sure you did all you could.'

'I did,' replied Roscoff curtly.

'But if you have any doubt of the fact,' she continued, 'come with me, I will show him to you

without his knowledge: perhaps you think a child's heart more constant than it is.'

'We all, some time or another, cherish foolish illusions, madam,' said Roscoff as he followed her across the house, Pepin at his heels.

She took him into her own apartments; in one of these, a small study where she passed much of her time, was an *œil-de-bœuf* concealed by a heavy curtain of tapestry, and led up to (for it was placed high) by some steps in the wall. She drew aside the curtain and motioned to Roscoff to ascend the steps. The concealed window looked down on a large well-warmed playroom.

It was a large, light room, made entirely of glass, with evergreen trees and flowering camellias in the corners of it, and parrots and canaries flying about it at liberty. Watched by two maids the children of the house were playing a kind of indoor football with a huge inflated rose-coloured ball as the goal; they were laughing, shouting, kicking, struggling, the parrots screaming and the canaries singing loudly in chorus. Foremost amongst them was Max. He was clad in a warm sailor suit

of navy blue, with a red silk shirt and red stockings; his little face, no longer pinched and wan, was rosy and radiant in the excitement of the game, his fair curls were flying, his little red legs were rushing hither and thither, and the silver buckles on his shoes shone and sparkled as he vigorously kicked at the rose-coloured ball.

'You are right,' said his grandfather briefly, as he turned from the window. 'You are right. He is quite happy.'

The lady took his hand in hers on an impulse of genuine sympathy. 'Ah, my poor friend!' she murmured; 'it is always so; they forget; we break our hearts for them in vain.'

'It is better it should be so,' said Roscoff harshly, it seemed to her. 'No, I will not disturb the child to-day; I wish him to forget.'

And he went away, leaving Max to his playfellows and his rose-coloured ball.

For remembrance and fidelity he had to go to a little humble thing on four legs, which was classed amongst the lower animals.

That winter was very long and dreary to Ros-

coff. The warmth from the hot-air pipes, diffused at an unvarying temperature throughout the house, left him cold. He had liked better the little charcoal fire in his attic, made under his little earthen pot of vegetable soup, or the blaze from a faggot now and then earned by doing errands for a seller of wood. He was always alone, except at meal times, when the enforced companionship was as much suffering to him after many months as it had been on the first day. Sometimes he smuggled Pepin in under his long rough greatcoat to keep him company through the long dull lonely nights, when he had nothing to do but to count the many sleepless hours and wonder what was the meaning of certain pains and discomforts which he felt at intervals in his body. When the spring came, the pains were greater and his strength was less. He had only seen Max once, at New Year, except through the *œil-de-bœuf*, where the mistress of the house, pitying him profoundly, allowed him to go and watch the child at play every week.

'The Hedgehog has more bristles than ever,' said the other inmates of the Institute.

Yet he never complained of anything; they were always complaining that the Barsac was too dry or the St. Emilion too new, that the bread was all crust or all crumb, that the bed linen was too often changed or not changed often enough, that the lights were put out too early or put out too late, that the journals in the reading-room were all too republican or too reactionary, too communistic or too clerical—they were complaining in some way or another from morning to night. Roscoff never complained. To the great sorrows of the spirit the shortcomings and worries of daily life seem small. He did not care what he ate or what he drank. He only asked to be let alone. Yet he remained an insubordinate in the eyes of the manager and the other officials; he was regarded as an element of disturbance and disorder. It is easier to gain a bad character than to lose it.

'Always an ingrate!' said the manager one day, seeing the coffee and white rolls of the early breakfast come untouched out of Roscoff's room, where they were sent as a special indulgence.

Roscoff heard the remark, but he said nothing;

he could have said that he had not eaten because of a mortal sickness which was on him when he rose, but he remained silent, partly because he did not care to defend himself, partly because he was afraid that they would send the physician affiliated to the Institute if he confessed to any indisposition.

This sensation of sickness often assailed him now, and more and more often as the days grew longer and the air softer, and the lilacs and laburnums came into blossom all through Paris and in her environs.

'I will go and ask Rémys what it indicates,' he said to himself. 'The faculty can sometimes tell where the machine is out of order, though they can seldom mend it.'

He went to a doctor whom he knew: a man who did not deceive or exaggerate, and had never become known to fame.

'I am ill, Rémys,' said Roscoff. 'I believe I have cancer. Examine me.'

The doctor did so carefully, and with intelligent diagnosis.

His face was very grave.

'It is what I thought?' asked Roscoff.

'It is,' replied the other.

'How long have I to live?'

The doctor hesitated.

'You are a brave man,' he said at length. 'It is best to tell you the truth. You have cancer of the œsophagus. To operate at your age would be useless. It may kill you in a month, two months, six months; I cannot say precisely, but before a year is out you will be dead.'

'That is what I wanted to know,' said Roscoff calmly; and he thanked the physician and withdrew.

He went out into the crowded and pleasant boulevards. Death did not (to him) bring with it any great agony of regret as it brings to the young, to the beloved, to the fortunate; yet its near certainty weighed on him heavily. Life was merely jarring, monotonous, irksome stuff to him since he had been imprisoned at Neuilly; yet he would fain have lived on to hold Valbranche to his promise, and to see the manhood of Max.

He walked on, with his head bent down and his steps slow and feebler than was their wont.

It was quite early in the forenoon when he learned his sentence; he went first to the house of which the entrance was in the Rue Monge.

'I know,' he said humbly to the mistress of it, 'I know that it is not yet the day due for me to see Max, but if you would for once allow me to anticipate it I should thank you. I will not detain him a moment.

She looked at him and saw that he was ill; his hale colour had changed to an ashy yellow, his cheeks were hollow, his eyes were heartbroken.

She asked him no questions, but said to him:

'Max is at play in the garden; come and look at him, as you always do, first, and then we will call him.'

'I thank you,' said Roscoff.

The children were on the lawn, playing with the same or a similar rose-coloured inflated ball. Max wore summer clothes of washing silk, and a straw sailor's hat was on the back of his pretty bright curls.

Roscoff watched the sport with strained and yearning gaze; the little dog, who had learned silence and patience under all trials, watching mutely too, only the tremor of his whole frame showing his longing to join the child.

When noon was rung from a clock tower near, the game ceased; the children came towards the house. The mistress of it called Max out alone.

'Come hither, dear,' she said to him; 'your grandfather has come.'

Max obeyed at once, but without alacrity; there was no pleased surprise or happy anticipation on his face; he advanced slowly through the open glass doors into the room, his little straw hat in his hand.

Pepin jumped on him in rapture. His grandfather gazed at him in silence.

'I am going away, Max,' he said at length, in a voice which thrilled painfully through the child's soul.

'Going!—where?'

'On a long voyage.'

'Does Pepin go?'

'You may be sure I shall not leave him behind me.'

Max was silent; astonished, not troubled. He rolled the azure ribbon of his hat to and fro nervously round his little fingers. He felt that he ought to show some sorrow, express some regret, and being, as yet, a very honest child, could not find words.

'You are not sorry,' said his grandfather abruptly. 'Do not pretend to be. Never feign.'

Max coloured to the eyes.

'When will you come back?' he stammered, stroking Pepin.

'Ouf! at my age who shall say?'

The child was frightened, the tone was rude.

There was a long silence. Max rolled his ribbon to and fro, and his downcast gaze was fastened on it.

His grandfather laid his large lean hand on the fair head.

'Max, whatever happens, promise me that you will do your best to be always truthful, kind, and honest. The Roscoffs were always poor men,

seamen, and fishers, and the like, but they were always men of honour. Promise me, my child.'

'I promise,' faltered the child, but there was not much heart in the sound of his voice; he was troubled by the words, 'seamen, and fishers, and the like.'

Suddenly, Roscoff bent down and caught him in his arms and kissed him many times; then put him away with a resolute gesture, called the dog and went. He knew that he would never see Max again on earth.

In the antechamber adjoining, the mistress of the house awaited him.

'Dear sir, you are ill!' she said, taking his hand.

But Roscoff silenced her.

'I am not well. But if you should hear I am worse, keep it from Max. I have told him I am going on a voyage, a long voyage. You are a good woman, madam, I think. If—if you should not see me again, take care of the child, and as he grows older and leaves your roof look after him still and keep him from temptation. He has no mother.'

Then he wrung her hand in his, and hurried from her presence; he was a proud man, who could endure no witnesses to his emotion.

She went into the room, where Max was still playing nervously with the blue ribbon of his hat.

'My dear little boy,' she said with tender seriousness, 'you do not value the greatest affection you will ever have given you in all your life. Pray for your grandfather, Max, day and night. I fear he will never return from the voyage he takes.'

Max burst into tears. They were tears of a real sorrow, a real penitence; but half an hour later he ate his cutlet, his pudding, and his fruit with good appetite.

When Roscoff left the child he traversed the streets which parted the Rue Monge from the Luxembourg. It was noonday; the gardens were full of playing children, sauntering nursemaids and wet-nurses, smart soldiers, careless, happy people. Leaving Pepin with an old friend whom he met near the Odéon, he entered the Musée and went on and on through its corridors, galleries, and halls, until he reached the place where his three finest

paintings were hung in a place of honour: the soft-tempered light falling clear upon them. There was the 'Jeunes Filles dansant au Pré,' the 'Lune Rousse à Marly,' and that picture which Valbranche had said that he visited once every spring, the 'Aube du Jour au Vésinet.'

He stood and looked at them long, with an immense yearning, an unspeakable regret. The genius which had wrought them was in him still; he felt its force, its vision, its power, stirring, tremulous, sweet, passionate in him as of old. But he had lost his right arm, and his sight was dim. Besides, he carried death in him: a death certain and near.

His eyes dwelt on his works as a dying lover's may upon the woman best beloved. How well he remembered every hour of every day when he had called them into being, above all the summer in which he had created the band of girls dancing around, and singing, with clasped hands, like woodland nymphs on the dewy grass of a meadow in maytime. It had been painted under the beeches and limes of Neuilly: poor Neuilly, now desecrated,

defaced, discrowned. He would die, but his maidens would live, dancing ever with flying feet above the blossomed grass.

Live, yes; how long? Until the next war, until the next revolution? The picture bought by Napoleon had been shattered and burned with the shells which had destroyed the palace of St. Cloud.

He turned back once, twice, thrice, to look at them again.

'Adieu, my children,' he said softly to them. Then he left them for evermore.

'You are ill, M. Roscoff?' said one of the officials of the Institute to him that evening.

'I am not very well,' replied Roscoff; 'but it is a malady which will cure itself.'

The old composer, who was near and heard, said to himself: 'His malady is being shut up here. You cannot teach a man like that to be content merely because his belly is filled and his body clothed.'

The next morning Roscoff said at the bureau: 'I am going out. I shall not be in until nightfall.'

'You are always out, sir,' said the keeper of the office, with impatience.

'To whom does that matter?' said Roscoff.

'Perhaps it does not matter,' said the young clerk. 'But it seems ungrateful to—to—your benefactors. The library, the *fumoir*, the general *salon*, all these beautiful rooms, all these appliances, these luxuries——'

'Wasted on me? To be sure, it is wrong not to be more grateful,' said Roscoff, in a tone which the functionary could not at all understand. Then he put down the key of his bedroom, and once more went out of doors.

He went, as usual, to the farm where Pepin was kept.

'Come, little man,' he said, as he unloosed the dog. 'We will have a last day together.'

There was a husky note in his voice as he spoke, as though the words choked him; but Pepin, jumping upon him in delight, did not notice that.

They passed the long sunny hours in that remnant of the park of Neuilly which was their

usual haunt. The dog ran about till he was tired. Roscoff had brought with him some rolls of bread and some cold meat, which he had purchased in Paris the previous day; they formed a feast for Pepin.

It was mid-June; the sky was cloudless, the air sweet and clear. In the undergrowth mavises and chaffinches were singing.

Roscoff sat on a fallen trunk, thinking, thinking, thinking: seeing always before his eyes the animated form of the merry child at play with the rosy-coloured ball. The long bright hours stole away, the woodland silence unbroken by any sound of the urban life so near, except when at intervals, borne on the breeze, came the scream of a railway whistle, the ringing of a factory bell, the distant echo of a tramway signal; all too far away to disturb the sylvan peace.

The sun sank lower and lower until only a golden haze of its reflected light fell upon the foliage of the trees and on the air. Pepin had gone into sound sleep at his master's feet. Roscoff looked down upon him wistfully and mournfully.

'Poor little friend!' he thought; 'we must part. I dare not leave you behind me. There is no one who would care for you. You are not young, or handsome, or rare; you know no poodle's tricks. They would send you to the Fourrière, and from the Fourrière like enough to the torture trough of the Sorbonne or the agonies of the Pasteur Institute. I can give you one refuge, my little friend, one only—the sole refuge the world has for fidelity.'

He stooped over the little dog, and stroked the rough yellow coat. Pepin looked up at him with loving, honest, hazel eyes; then, being tired and content, dropped his head on the grass again, and again slept.

A shudder ran through the frame of Roscoff. Still stroking with his left hand softly the body of the little dog, he drew from his breast a small revolver, and, leaning over Pepin, shot him through the head, as Henri Crampel shot his too faithful little friend in the jungle of Africa. The dog sighed once, and, sighing, stretched out his limbs, while his jaw dropped; he had passed scarce consciously from sleep to annihilation.

The great tears fell from Roscoff's eyes upon him where he lay.

'Forgive me! forgive me!' he murmured. 'There was nothing else I could do for you.'

When the stars were out and the moon had risen he laid Pepin within the hollow of the old oak, and covered him with mosses and long grass and sods of earth. Then he himself went back to his prison house, whither honour took him.

He was late and was met by a reprimand which he heard not. He climbed painfully to his chamber, undressed with effort, and went to his bed.

He never rose from it again.

He suffered greatly, and release was long in coming to him.

He asked repeatedly through many weeks for Valbranche, but it was not until late in the autumn that Valbranche returned to Paris. When he did so he came to the Institute.

'Shall I bring Max?' he asked, conscience-stricken and pale with emotion.

Roscoff shook his head.

Why darken and sadden the child's life?

'Would to God I had let you alone!' said the rich man. 'I meant for the best, believe me.'

'I believe you,' said Roscoff; 'but promise me now—be true to him and do not make him such a man as yourself—make him what I would wish.'

'I will,' said Valbranche deeply moved. 'On my honour, I will.'

The honour of Valbranche was but a rotten staff which had often failed those who had leaned on it, but there was a look on his face, a sound in his voice, which told Roscoff that in the future it would not fail Max.

The spasms of death seized him; his eyes closed, his lips gasped, his throat rattled, and then for a time he lay so still, so breathless, that he seemed already a corpse.

The sun shone into the room, and as it touched his eyelids with its warmth they unclosed and the eyes looked up, but in them there was no sight.

'Come Max, come Pepin,' he murmured as he smiled vaguely at the light; 'let us go and have a day in the woods: they have set me free. I will paint and you shall play, my children.'

He stretched his arms out longingly to the sun which he could not see; then his head fell back and a little blood oozed from his mouth; he was dead.

AN ASSASSIN

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An Assassin

'BABBO!' they cried across the fields; 'Babbo!'

'Here!' he answered.

The same shout, the same reply, were heard a score of times in every day. They always wanted him to go here, to go there, to do something, to fetch or carry, to mind or make, to act as scapegoat, or as umpire, between conflicting rights and wishes. He came up the steep hillside field between the ranks of the maples and vines, patiently, steadily, with his back bowed, and his resigned tired look upon his face, and his little red dog trotting at his heels.

He was a man not more than fifty, not quite so

much indeed, but men who work in fields at all hours and in hot and cold weather age very early; the furrows grow deep in their faces, and the skin is crossed and recrossed with multitudinous lines like a spider's web, the spine gets bent from the long hours of stooping over the earth, and the heat and the damp and the frost all turn by turn enter into the bones, and stiffen and cramp them before old age is due. He was a broad-built man of middle height, with fine features and grey thick hair, and a look of strength and fatigue blent together; he wore a rose-coloured cotton shirt and grey cotton trousers pulled up to his knee, and a blue apron twisted up round his loins, and beneath that a leathern belt; his shirt was open at his throat and showed his hairy chest; his feet were bare and green from grass and moss, as stones get green which lie in water.

It was his wife who had called him; he was Babbo (father) to her as to his children. She was a woman about his own age, with a classic face and dark large eyes, who in her youth had possessed considerable charms, but now was like a soiled and

dust-begrimed picture; her feet, like his, were bare; she wore a dingy cotton gown which had seen rain and sun.

She was brown and thin and dirty. Once she had been the beauty of her hamlet, but that time was now very long ago.

'Babbo! Are you deaf?' she cried shrilly, standing beside the tank which held the liquid manure which was oozing out brown and slimy and noxious, and trickling amongst the golden celandine and the burdock leaves.

'Here I am,' he said again, as one who says, 'Do you ever spare me, and do I ever resist?'

'Celso is going into the town,' she cried, 'and the mule bites and kicks little Tisto, he can't put it to, anyhow.'

Her husband said nothing, but mounted some low grass-grown steps which led up to a grassy court where the stables stood. The wooden doors stood open, and in the darkness of the unclean stinking stall there were dimly seen the forms of a mule and a boy of twelve struggling together for the mastery.

'Come, come; patience, my Moro,' said the man in a soft tone, half entreaty, half command; and he stroked the nose of the angry black mule, whose curled-up lip showed yellow teeth all ready for a snarl and bite.

Silently the peasant took the bit and headstall from his little son Tisto's hands, and began to harness the mule, which nibbled pleasantly at his shirt sleeves and showed no more temper or resistance. When the harness was on he backed the animal into the shafts of a little two-wheeled ramshackle cart, and buckled the various straps; then led the cart out into the sunshine.

'He will stand still if you flick the flies off him,' he said to the boy; then he prepared to go back to his work in the field without offering any complaint or protest against the interruption.

His wife was standing with eager intent eyes watching a gate in a wall near; she did not thank him or notice him.

The gate opened on rusty hinges, and a young man came out of the opening in the wall.

'I knew Tisto could manage the beast if he

tried,' he said as he walked forwards, lazily, laughingly.

'Tisto cannot; I harnessed Moro,' said the elder man briefly, and went away down the stone stairs to his work. He did not look at the youth, nor at his wife, who was the mother of the youth.

He went back to his work amongst the maize, cutting its stalks down to where the cob grew, and carrying the cut stalks with their rich green leaves and their fluttering tassels to the cattle sheds, leaving the cones to ripen till All Saints' Day.

He had worked hard like this all the days of his life, and would work thus until death or paralysis laid hold of him.

The young man at whom he had not looked drove away in the mule cart, his mother gazing as proudly after him as though he had been lord of the world. He had nodded carelessly to her from his seat in the cart, and she had blown him kisses eagerly from her two brown hands and pallid lips.

The youth was twenty-three years of age; he had a broad stupid face with a red mouth, on which sat usually a self-satisfied smile, and a straight,

slim, well-made figure; he had large and handsome eyes with an insolent stare in them, and a clear ruddy skin tinted like an apricot. Rustic maidens thought him beautiful, as his mother did; but his most devoted adorer did not admire him more than he admired himself.

His name was Celso, and he was the eldest of the family of seven, male and female, which called Abbondio Castellani, father. They had all been born here under these old red and brown tiles, amongst the apple trees and mulberries, and had thriven on the dunghills and the cesspool and the dirt and the rotting vegetable refuse, and the close stifling atmosphere of the sleeping-places, blooming and laughing children of Hygeia, though they heeded none of her rules and disobeyed all her injunctions. Oxygen, the brother of Hygeia, looked after these rebels and saved them from their dire punishment. They shut him, indeed, obstinately out of their chambers; but he was with them all day long in the fields, by the streams, under the hedges, and saved them from themselves in their own despite.

They were all tall, strong, good-looking youths and maidens these boys and girls who called him Babbo, but they were all fair, like him. Celso alone was dark of eyes and hair; their lips were thin, and his were full; their eyebrows were straight, and his were arched; their foreheads were broad, and his was narrow; he was as unlike them as the cuckoo is unlike the finch in whose nest he has been hatched. When he said 'Babbo' to the head of the house he knew that the elder man, used though he was to the epithet from him, heard it unwillingly, and therefore Celso used it very often, and, when near enough for the other to see him, said it with a sneer, wrinkling up his nose, and a laugh on his red lips.

He was a fool, but he had the cunning of the fool. He knew what it would have been better that he should never have known. His laugh, silly, jeering, cruel, said to the elder man:

'You know you are nothing to me; you know your wife was big with me when you took her to church; you know you, who call yourself such an honest man, played a churl's part then; you know

that I am the son of a gentleman; you know it all as well as I do!'

And the elder man did know it. Working amongst the plumes of the maize this day he thought it all over for the ten thousandth time, and cursed his own folly of long ago.

The woman who stood now at the door looking after the mule cart as it rattled down the path between the peach and cherry and pear trees, had been a great beauty at eighteen years old, a brown lithe radiant creature, daughter of a peasant and of generations of peasants, but of a noble carriage and a resplendent colouring, like an autumn flower. Abbondio had wooed her unsuccessfully for two seasons; he, seven years older than herself, a fair, stalwart, good-humoured fellow, the eldest son of his house, and so with right to make an early marriage. For months she refused his offer, then suddenly accepted him. When they were firmly bound together by mayor and vicar, he learned why. Repudiate her he could not; kill her he would not; he loved her greatly, sincerely, passionately.

When, weeping and trembling for fear of his

vengeance, she confessed to him that she was with child by the young cavalry officer whose father owned the lands on which her people lived, he shrank from letting his family and neighbours know how he had been fooled. He forgave her; he was weak, and his passion overcame his manhood. When the child was born the countryside thought it a son of his; and he was weaker still, and lived with her year after year, and had children by her. Of the young cuirassier they saw nothing; he had married in the south, and never came near the scene of his forgotten idyll. Little by little Chiara had let her beauty go, and become the soiled, meagre, sunburnt, fretful woman she now was. Little by little Abbondio had changed from the bright, ruddy, happy young husbandman which he had been on his marriage-day to the toil-worn, silent, plodding, serious man which he now was. He might have gone away, but men of his class never dream of going away; they are part of the soil which they till. Thinking over the past now, he did not see what he could have done other than what he did. If only she had been grateful he would never have complained nor

regretted. But he had never had a word or a sign of gratitude from her.

He recalled that nuptial night when the moon looked in through the lattice of the little lean-to attic full of the smell of the fruit garnered in the garret adjacent. He saw in memory her trembling shuddering nudity crouched down before him; her long, loose hair lying on the bricks, her heaving breasts pressed against his own bare feet as she wept and sobbed and quivered and implored his pardon. Well, he had pardoned her, not only once then, but every day ever since for four-and-twenty years; he had never lifted his hand against her, or his voice; he had carried his knowledge silently in him, and had sought no counsel from his priest or comfort from his mother; he did not know whether he had done ill or well, but that was what he had done. And never once in four-and-twenty years had the woman shown him any kindness, or given him any affection.

As the years rolled on his parents had gone to their rest under the cypresses of the village church, and Abbondio had become head of the house in his

stead on this old place of Filibrana, which had been the homestead of the Castellani ever since days of old, which lie far away in obscurity, covered with the cobwebs of the centuries.

It was part of an estate which occupied a position of much beauty, lying on a hillside turned to the south-west, with a range of pine woods behind it, and at its feet a river unknown to fame but running a varied course through poplar groves, and beds of flag and iris and stony rocky banks, and quiet fields with corn and vines. The farmhouse had once been an old posting place; it was rambling, tumble-down, beautiful in colour, russet and grey and brown, with tiled roofs and deep eaves and high chimneys, and mulberry and apple trees growing close to it, and pushing their boughs in at its casements, which as often as not were unglazed. The poultry ran in and out of the house, and up and down the stairs. The dungheap was at the door, and self-sown convolvulus and columbine grew in it. The ass and mule and cows were kept in the dark in stables which were never aired or cleaned. The uneven pavements of the court had never been

mended for two hundred years, and after rain the little yellow ducklings could swim in the little pools between the stones. Over one side of the house wistaria climbed luxuriantly, and in spring was a sheet of lilac blossom, but no one ever attended to it, and it was broken and spoiled in various places by children and by rats.

In front was a little garden, fenced in with bay, and with some straggling oleanders and a fragrant olive in it; in the old time it had been pretty. On the other side were the sheds, where the poor milch cows passed their weary lives chained up in the dark, and knowing nought of the joys of the pasture and the sunshine. 'For sure it is not a life for a living creature,' said Abbondio sometimes, with pity in his heart for them; but everybody kept their cows in that manner. No one ever thought air or movement necessary for them, and even if he had attempted to put them out to graze his overseer would have been down on him instantly for such a waste of land.

Indoors there was the vaulted kitchen with the large black fireplace, which had been there centuries

before in the posting house; the iron chain for the iron soup pot, and the iron dogs on which to rest the firewood in the centre of it, and on each side the charcoal pits and gratings. It was so big that two men could sit on stools upon each of its hobs close to the burning logs, and did so sit willingly on winter nights.

On either side were rooms with rude massive wooden furniture and bedsteads and coarse crockery. It was all very dirty and untidy; there were thick cobwebs on the walls and ceilings, and a strong choking scent everywhere of garlic, of dung, of onions, of wine, of fried oil, of foul linen, and of unwashed flesh. All these interiors are alike. The red bricks of the floors were grey from the mud and dust which the many feet passing over them brought in at all seasons. There was abundance of fresh spring water bubbling out from a spout in a wall without, and filling a square stone tank just outside the door, but the water was never used by anybody except in washing vegetables and to slake the thirst of the cattle. The land ran side by side with land belonging to that young noble who had been

Chiara's undoing; the fields were only divided by a deep ditch in which a runlet of water rippled, and by a large black poplar tree, round whose stately head swallows and bats spent every summer's eve in a wild and whirling waltz.

The master of the estate was a banker in Rome, and his steward only visited it at intervals; after harvest, vintage, or oil pressing. The peasants on it did pretty much as they chose, and were left to the old ways and habits which had prevailed there for hundreds of years. The ugly sulphur pumps, and the sulphate of copper syphons, and the black liquid manure from houses and hospitals, did indeed defile the fields by order of the steward; but most other things were ordered as they had been in the previous century, only nothing prospered so well, or was done so easily, as in those simpler times. There had been more abundance, more content, less expenditure, more pleasure in work for work's sake, in those times.

Abbondio, though he looked old, was not yet an old man; but he could remember that things had been otherwise, and men and women happier, in the days when he had been in his teens.

His father had been a mirthful, kindly, and good-hearted man, brave in a black velvet jacket on feast days, and a red waistcoat, which lasted his life; and his mother had been a comely dame, with a large store of linen and woollen in her presses, and a good-humoured authority which her sons and daughters never resisted till the day of her death. Those fine stores had dwindled in Chiara's careless, feeble hands, and the authority too had vanished with them in a great measure. The effort to make ends meet was harder, and the boys and girls were always wanting to dress themselves up to look something they were not. Nobody wore homespun any more, except himself, and a few old women were the only people who span on the whole country side.

He thought it all over as he worked amongst the maize: the comely lass that Chiara was in those days, with her swift brown feet flying along the grass; his pride in her when their names were read out at mass in the village church; his rage and shame when he found that she had only married him to hide her state from her family;

his stupid bewilderment, his useless wrath, his abject acceptation—he lived it all over in his thoughts as he cut the thick juicy stalks.

Yet what else could he have done? If he had told of her and left her, poor creature, what would have become of her?

She had been the worst of wives to him, thriftless, dirty, lazy, ignorant, wasteful; though farm work had been about her from her infancy she had never done it well; her hens never laid, her silkworms never prospered; she never served the meals correctly; the boys and girls ate where they chose, carrying out their bowl of soup or platter of fry to any spot which pleased them; there was no order or regularity or thrift where she was, for if the husband rule the outdoor labour, the indoor work belongs wholly to the wife; her cows easily sickened; she baked heavy bread; she sent half the clothes out to be made in the nearest village; she let her children, when they were small, go in rags and run riot as they chose; she was always ailing, or pretending that she ailed something; she had a woman in always to help her with the washing; and

she spited and thwarted her husband and his kindred on every occasion she could seize.

Eh! women were like that, he said to himself. Be good to them, they scorned you; beat them, curse them, starve them, drive them, and they kissed the dust you trod! They were all like that. She had given him some fine children indeed: well built, buxom, healthy people, and not lazier or more hard to teach than most youngsters were. But they were all ruined for him by Celso, by that hateful upstart and bastard who had grown up with them as the hemlock grows with the seeding grass. Any pleasure he might have had in them was marred, and jarred, by Celso. That, too, was the woman's fault. From the time Celso had been in swaddling clothes she had waited on his every whim, sacrificed herself and everything else to him, made him the vain, useless, selfish, hateful thing he was. Nothing had been good enough for her bastard; nothing had been denied to him that a poor, silly, worshipping mother had means to get for him.

Chiara was one of those women—they may be numbered by millions—who cannot keep their own counsel, who would talk and blab even though their indiscretion cost them their lives. Through her, Celso, before he had reached ten years old, had known that he was the son of a gentleman, and had conceived abiding scorn for the man whom he called father and for his half brothers and sisters—a scorn all the more impudent and unbridled because based upon ignorance, foolishness, and error.

Chiara had always ruined the lad. She had let him lie his full length through the heat of the day; smoke and strut and drink when he was a mere baby; have rich morsels to eat apart, while the others all munched their dry bread and supped up noisily their bean or lentil soup. As he had grown older she had saved up her scanty pence to buy pomades for his hair, smart ties for his throat, penny cigars for him to puff, little canes for him to twirl; and let him go into the town vainglorious and decked out, whilst the young sons of Abbondio worked hard, even on feast days, in their cotton or woollen shirts,

with battered straw hats or dented and greasy felt ones, according to the season, on their tawny crisp curls.

'As if the others were not hers, too,' thought their father bitterly; 'as if because they are mine they are nothing to the womb which carried them!'

He was a just man, and she was an unjust woman.

'One osier is straight and another osier stoops over the stream,' he reflected; 'you cannot alter that; Nature made them so.'

Of the word philosophy he had certainly never heard, and he had never had anyone to teach him anything, but Nature had made him like the straight-growing osier, and he was of a ruminant meditative mind.

'A woman is but a thread, as one may say,' his father observed once, 'but so is the wick of a candle, and if the wick runs away with the grease, the tallow can't move the wick.'

That one moment of generosity and divine pardon in which he had condoned the offence of the woman who had cheated him cost him more than

many a cruelty and crime cost other men. It was the one mistake on the threshold of life which darkened for ever all the house of life.

Nature had made him cheerful; if he had had a pleasant home he would have been cheerful in it. In his youth the old place had been gay with the guitar and the songs and the recitals of tales and legends in the long winter evenings, when the females span or plaited in the intervals of the dances, and the males never dreamed of going, as the boys went now, for diversion and drink to the eating house or wineshop in the village, but sat round their own hearths or footed the *tresco* with their betrothed. What sound, merry laughter that old kitchen had heard in the years of his youth! What well-played airs of mandoline and lute! what well-sung ballads and joyous choruses! And then at only a sign from the mother out the lights had gone, and up like dutiful children, men and women both, and to bed.

Now there was laughter sometimes indeed, since there were boys and girls in the house, but there was more quarrelling, bickering, screaming; the lads

stole off when they could to the village, and the old guitars lay covered with dust on a shelf, for nobody knew how to play on them. Instead of the old lays and the old stories there was a halfpenny newspaper read out by the flare of a petroleum flame, and telling of murder and rape and strikes and the speeches of socialists. Dance the youngsters did still, sometimes, but it was no more the old simple rustic measures; it was the waltz or the polka, with the wooden heels of the heavy shoes clumsily striking the brick floor at every awkward round.

And when their mother wanted them to go to bed she screamed and scolded and pushed and pulled in vain, and sometimes the young ones fell asleep, clothed as they were, on chair or settle or pile of straw with the mud or the dust on their feet and legs as they had come that day out of the fields.

He ought to have kept them in order, and he would have done so despite their mother had it not been for the evil influence of the one who passed as his eldest son. Celso had them all in his hands, and moved them about as if they were pawns.

They saw with Celso's eyes, they heard with Celso's ears; they were more afraid of Celso's sneer than of any flogging or scolding.

She had told him what he should never and need never have known. She had made him think himself of finer clay than his brothers and sisters. She had pampered him and cockered him up, and waited on him and poured his praises all day long into his ears until he did not know whether he was on his head or his heels.

Of his knowledge he made a whip with which he lashed and drove his mother, and a wasp swarm which he let loose, whenever he was in the humour, about the head of her husband.

'Why do I bear with him? Why do I not kick him out and have done with him?' thought Abbondio twenty times a year; but he was patient and kind and generous—his wife's heart was set on this wretched boy—he let him bide and trusted to time to rid him of the incubus, as gentle and forbearing people do, forgetting that time, as often as not, does nothing to loosen a chain, but only rivets it the closer.

Time is sometimes a healer, but it is as often as not a gaoler.

It was now August, and August is the least lovely month in this country. The vines are discoloured with sulphur and sulphate. The fields, already ploughed, lie bare, with straggling half-grown weeds trying in vain to cover their nakedness. The fruit trees are sere and yellow from the heat. The maize has been cut down to its cone. There are few flowers, only the little yellow dragon's mouth, the rosemary, and the hemlock. The richness, the luxuriance, the gaiety of the early summer are past, and the rains have not yet come to renew the beauty of the earth. What are still beautiful are the nights; the planets are displayed in all their glory, and the meteors are racing in giddy haste from Perseus down the sky.

Peasants do not look at planet or Perseus. They are indoors at those hours eating their onions and fennel and bread, or snoring heavily with their unwashed hairy limbs tossed over the edges of their narrow mattresses.

'Is Celso gone into the town, Babbo?' asked a fresh girl's voice wistfully as he cut down the stalks of the maize.

'Yes,' he answered; 'why?'

'He said he would take me with him,' said the girl, with a sound like a little sob.

'You are better where you are,' said Abbondio.

The child sighed.

She was his niece, though she called him father like the rest. She was the daughter of his dead brother; a pretty, blooming, hazel-eyed, auburn-haired little maid, fresh as a growing lettuce, bright as a chaffinch; she wore a pink cotton frock kilted up to her bare knees, a blue apron twisted round her waist, and had a broad-leafed old straw hat slung at her back. She too was cutting the maize, and stooped again over her work: if tears fell on the leaves, the leaves told no tale.

'I do not care for you to go with Celso anywhere,' said Abbondio in his grave, gentle tones. 'Do you remember that, Bina.'

Her name was Balbina.

She did not answer.

'I will take you into the town, child, some Friday,' said her uncle. 'Not that there is any good got going there for man or maid or beast.'

'Celso goes often,' said Bina timidly.

'And does he get much good there, or bring much good here from it?' asked her uncle, an unwonted hardness in his mellow voice.

He could never help that tone coming into his voice whenever he spoke of the bastard. Bina knew nothing of the reason for it; she thought it was because Celso was idle and disobedient. Every one knew he was that, and that Babbo, who never spared himself, could not endure self-indulgence and insolence in anyone.

She tried to make excuses for her idol, but Abbondio stopped her.

'Spare your breath, little one; you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. The lad is no good. The less you talk of him or think of him the better; you may be sure he is thinking of some hussy in the town and not of you. We are none of us fine enough, little one, for Sir Celso.'

Bina coloured till her always rosy little face was

like a ruddy tomato, and she stooped silently over her work, gathering up the cut stalks in her round arms. Her cousin Celso told her a different story when he caught her alone under the maples and vines at twilight.

Bina had been in the family all her life. Her father had been killed by an ox in the second year after her birth, and Abbondio had always taken his place towards her, and loved her dearly—more dearly even than his own children, because the taint of Chiara's treachery was reflected on all of them. He had her future husband in view: the elder son of a neighbour, a peasant like himself; for Bina had been used to the life of the fields from babyhood, and could not have thriven away from the grass paths, and the running brooks, and the ripening fruits, and the fresh air of the country side. When she had been too small to walk a step he had carried her on his shoulder down to where his own labour lay, and had set her amongst the green wheat or the ripe, amongst the sprouting cabbages or the flowering beans, on the wild thyme in the grass, or under the laden boughs of the

cherry trees, according to the season or the kind of work which occupied him; and Bina had played with her own toes or her own fingers, had laughed at the butterflies, and cooed to the swallows, and nibbled fruits, and slept with her head on the dog's body, and been no trouble at all to him; and had grown up to feel, as he felt, that there is no friend so sure and so sound in life as the green fields and the blue skies.

Neither she nor he knew that they felt thus, because the peasant never thinks clearly enough to be aware of what he thinks; they would only have become aware of it if they had been sent away from the freedom of the fields, and the sight of the skies, and shut up in a street or a cell, when they would have alike suffered, as the bull and the heifer suffer when they are driven away from the green pastures to the railway cattle truck.

'How old are you, Bina?' said he this day, as they worked amongst the maize. Men are seldom accurate as to the years of the women around them.

'Eighteen, Babbo, come All Saints' Day,' said

the girl with that pride in growing old which characterises the very young and the very aged.

'By Bacchus!' murmured Abbondio; he had thought her thirteen or fourteen: 'it is time you were wed, little one. Women are like apples and pears, they must not hang long on the stalk.'

'As you please, Babbo,' said Bina.

She hoisted her great sheaf of maize stalks upon her back and went uphill with it, the ribbon-like leaves rattling and rustling as she climbed, and the brown tassels falling over her eyes.

'She is shy—the little goose!' said her uncle to himself. 'I will speak on Sunday to Nattalino's people.'

Nattalino was the young man whom he had singled out for her, whose family lived at an old grey building, once a convent, set amongst walnut and ilex trees on the hill opposite, a mile or less than a mile distant.

He would not be able to give her much: linen, a bed, two gowns, a string of pearls, the usual necessary obligatory dower: more he could not do for her in justice to his daughters, but so much he

would and could do. He had the money ready, put by in old broad silver pieces, such as are never seen now unless they come out of some peasant's rusty iron box or some village priest's carven oak chest.

Of the future of his own girls he was sometimes afraid. They had the leaven of their mother in them, and hankered after cheap jewellery, smart colours, new ways of doing their hair and of cutting out their Sunday gowns. But Bina cared for none of that rubbish, and scarcely ever looked in the glass.

She was docile and simple and laborious, up with the lark, and untiring. As nothing tanned her pretty bright skin, so nothing tired her elastic muscles. She worked like a boy; much better than a boy. What fine children she would bring into the world, and on what wholesome milk she would suckle them!

But the subject of marriage was unwelcome to her.

It perplexed and disturbed him that she had run away. Maidens are not shy in rustic life. They

laugh merrily when anyone speaks of their nuptials, and chatter as willingly as magpies and monkeys when there is any question of their outfit, their banns, or their bridal clothes.

For Bina to have run away when such a subject was mooted was without any precedence in rural life.

Well, it should all be arranged without her, thought her uncle. It was generally best done so; the happiest unions were those which were the outcome of judicious parental choice, and careful weighing and pondering by the elders of two families. Abbondio remembered ruefully that he had gone against his mother's counsels in his love suit and his marriage, and that only with much reluctance and unwillingness had his father's consent been conceded.

'Passion is a bad guide in a lifelong bargain,' he said to himself as he slashed again at the tall stalks of the maize.

If he had hearkened to his own people he would have shut his eyes and hardened his heart to the nutbrown beauty of Chiara, and would have taken

as his helpmate a good docile fair-haired damsel, daughter of the miller at the little corn mill on the river, who had possessed a tidy dower, and was industrious and chaste and blithe. She had married her father's foreman and still lived at the little mill, of which she had become the mistress, with the huge black wheels churning in the water under the cane brakes; she had a set of serious, gentle, cleanly children, he saw them at mass every Sunday and saint's day, and she was always cheerful and quiet, and the big black wheels ground means enough for all to dwell in comfort.

He never took a sack of grain to be ground there but what he looked at her wistfully, and thought of the fate which might have been his if he had not been a fool, a blind, stubborn, accursed fool, standing in his own light and pouring out his cupful of blessings in waste upon the sand.

Yes; love was a trap and a snare, and a man in love knew no more what he did than the birds do when they perch on the lines of the telegraph, and the unseen lightning flies along and slays them in their temerity and ignorance and trust.

Abbondio could not get to sleep quickly this night after his speech with his little niece. Bina's manner had seemed to him strange. Sometimes Abbondio thought with vague disquietude that it is only the sweetest and soundest fruit which most attracts the wasps and worms. But Bina was always under his own eye and his own roof, and, though to part with her would be hard, he meant to marry her early to this good industrious youth; and the welfare of his brother's child was dear to him.

Had Celso been philandering with her? It was unlikely, he thought. Celso's vanity would make him seek city maidens, and trolls with French bonnets on their heads, or what they called so. His little cousin, with grass seeds in her curls and grass stains on her feet, would not be fine enough for him.

Bina slept in a room next to his with his three daughters, Petronilla, Felicita, and Savina. Through the thin wattle partition he could always hear their voices babbling; loud, shrill voices, as the voices of all peasants are. This evening he heard his own girls chattering and squabbling as usual; but

the voice of Bina he did not hear. He rapped on the partition wall, and called to them :

'Is Bina there, children ?'

Petronilla called back to him, 'Lord! yes, Babbo! Where should she be ?'

And Bina's voice added :

'I am here, Babbo. Do you want me ?'

'Remember to take the fowls to Don Placido at dawn. He wants them the first thing,' said Abbondio, by way of excuse for his silly interrogation, and not knowing very well himself what suspicions had moved him to ask the question.

'Yes, Babbo,' replied the child meekly; and Petronilla said angrily to her, 'He always sends you to the vicarage that you may get the housekeeper's coffee. S'iora Marta always gives you coffee, fine and hot, with lots of sugar; you cannot say she does not give you coffee.'

'You always send Bina that she may get the coffee!' they said, with tears of rage, to their father in the morning.

'I send Bina because she does not loiter on the way, and does not chatter with S'iora Marta,

and does not steal the vicar's sugar out of the bowl,' said their father; the girls grew red, and hung their heads. They knew very well that they were gossips and dawdlers, and that when they could pilfer a morsel they did so.

The cup of coffee which the vicar's housekeeper was wont to give to any early morning visitor was much coveted in the district, it being black as jet, and sweet as molasses, and thick as mud with grounds, which is the ideal of coffee to rural drinkers. Any one of them would willingly take any day the mile-long walk up a stony shadeless hill for sake of a cup of that coffee.

S'iora Marta, like all priests' housekeepers, was curious, and a chatterbox, and she had many a time kept these little human sieves by her with bribes of cake and almonds, to get out of them all they knew of their parents and neighbours.

Bina was not to be so tempted; she liked sweetstuffs as well as her cousins; but when it was a question of gossiping she shut tight her rosebud of a mouth.

'Babbo says women are the perdition of the world with their chatter,' she said stubbornly, and was not to be seduced.

Petronilla and Felicita and Savina—known in their family and neighbourhood as Nilla and Ciccia and Vina—were not actually envious of her, because they were good-natured girls, and knew that their father was a just man. Moreover Bina was useful to them, and always willing to be so; but they did not love her any better than mediocrity loves superiority at any time. She was in their way. They could not very well stay in bed when she was up at cockcrow. They could not ride behind the donkey when she walked beside him and helped the wheels out of the ruts. They could not lie down in the straw, and suck one cow's udder and smack their lips, when she was loyally pressing the milk of another into a pail. She was an irritation and offence to them, as excellence of any kind must be to indolence and incompetence, however unpresuming and unconscious excellence may be. Besides she laughed at them: laughed at their efforts to look like

town people on Sundays, at the braids and coils into which, once a week, they distorted their abundant hair, at the trouble they took to get some one to lend them paper patterns of fashions which they thought new, though they were old. It was not in human nature for them to love Bina, though, alas! they could not entirely despise her ever since Celso, their supreme arbiter and example, had said once, 'The little one is prettier than any of you.'

And they knew they were not ill-favoured. They were, indeed, idyllic to look at when they ran hand in hand down the grass paths under the linked vines; they had the old classic lines, the old classic grace. On holy days, on feast days, when they were oiled and combed, and busked and stockinged, they were horrible. But that they did not know, nor would they have believed, though an angel had descended from the skies to tell them so.

The disease of the close of the century had reached even their remote hills and valleys, and the hunger for something they had not, the thirst to be something they were not, was in them, little igno-

rant, humble peasants though they were. It made them discontented, restless, saucy, idle, and, at times, very ill-tempered and unmanageable. They were a cause of care and alarm to their father, for he knew that their mother's influence was always exercised on them against his wishes and his orders, and she was of necessity so much more often beside them than he could be. She did not love them, for all the love of her shallow soul was centred on her first-born; but she had that affinity of sex with them which makes women cling together and hold together when there is any question of opposing or outwitting the males of the family.

Late in the afternoon, when Abbondio was some distance away from the house with one of his sons beside the little watercourse which ran under willows and osiers and mulberries, dividing his farm from another, Vina came flying over the ploughed slopes, her auburn hair in innumerable little curls catching the slanting sun rays and glowing red as copper.

'Babbo, Babbo!' she cried to him, 'mother wants you. She has some news for you.'

'It can wait till supper time, surely,' said Abbondio, straightening his aching back.

'No, no; you must go up at once!' said the child imperiously and pettishly. 'Mother can't come down here, she is tired.'

'Is it about 'Faello?'

Raffaello was the son who was serving his time with the artillery at a great hot stony town in the south, where the cholera was said to be.

'I dare say it is,' said Vina, standing on tiptoe to pluck a fig from a branch above her head. 'You'd better go up and see, Babbo. Mother is all in a twitter and twinkle, and she has got two red spots on her cheeks, and she says to me: "Go quick, and send your father here." And she shied a big bit of charcoal at me.'

Vina tore open her fig and pressed its ruddy inside into her own red little mouth.

Abbondio scraped the heavy soil off the soles of his feet on the top of his spade, and unwillingly climbed the steep fields lying hot in the late August sun. He was always afraid when he heard of any excitability on his wife's part, for at times she fell

into convulsions such as townspeople call hysterics, and he always feared lest in one of these fits she should let her daughters know the story of her youth and Celso's birth.

He saw her from afar off, standing under the wooden loggia, amongst the drying millet sheaves, the piled brambles, the dead leaves, the dirty carts, the hencoops, the turkey poults, the unused ploughshares, the empty barrels, the bunches of sage and mint and thyme, the broken milk-flasks, which were all pell-mell together in happy-go-lucky confusion. As he drew nearer he saw that she was in an odd and excited state as Vina had said. He had never seen her look so proud and gleeful since the day of Celso's first communion, when the bishop had singled him out for admiration and had called him a little Perugino, which had flattered her the more because she had not a notion what it meant.

As he approached she screamed out to him: 'What think you? He is come back!'

Abbondio nodded. He knew that Celso had returned, for he had seen the mule come over the brow of the hill to the left of the house.

Chiara, with a cunning silly triumph on her face, leaned nearer to him.

'Dost hear me, Babbo? He is come back.'

'Who?'

'Count Ausano.'

'What!'

Her husband shouted the single word so loud, and in a voice so changed, that she was startled and frightened. But she put her arms akimbo and braved him: all sorts of foolish pride and vague ambitious schemes were in her silly head, not for herself but for her Celso.

'He is come back,' she repeated, 'and they do say he has taken quite a fancy to the place, and is going to buy the land all round it, this as well as other; and his wife is dead, and sons they never had, and who knows but what my boy may not get all in time when he knows, as know he shall, and sooth to say, if he only looks in Celso's face he cannot doubt, for it is his own very moral——'

'Silence!' said Abbondio. Then he added slowly, being a man of few words and deliberate thought, never made easily clear to himself:

'You say your man of long ago is here? Your bastard's father? Is that so?'

'Ay, ay, it is so,' repeated Chiara, her arms still in her sides, nodding and smiling vacantly but vaingloriously. 'And why should you glower like that? Good Lord! It may prove a rare fine thing for me and mine, and we shall not forget you, be sure, for you have been a good hardworking mate to me, though you are but a clod, as one may say, beside those who have manners and learning, and the ways of the town.'

Abbondio took no notice of her gibes. He was so used to them that he noticed them no more than he did the flies which were always buzzing in his ears and lighting on his eyelids. But he laid his two hands on her shoulders and swayed her to and fro with a heavy even pressure.

'If you had had any decency in you your son would never have known whence he came.'

'Ho, ho! poor lad! Why should he not take what pleasure he can in knowing he has gentle blood in his veins?'

'You are a shameless woman, wife.'

'Ho, ho! I am what all women are; take my word for it.'

'God forbid!' He still held his hands on her shoulders, rocking her to and fro.

'List to me, woman,' he said in her ear. 'I have kept your bastard for four-and-twenty years, and a curse he has been; but of that I say nought; 'tis not his fault, maybe—it comes of them by whom he was made. But this I do say, and mind it well—neither you nor he will have aught to do with the man who begot him, and who for four-and-twenty years has never thought on him or on you. The fellow has passed as my son, and has borne my name, and I let it be so that neighbours might not jeer, nor my father and brother, God rest their souls! call me foul names. I have let bygones be bygones, and I have borne with you and with him; but now, hearken and obey. I will not have you tell this man aught nor see him. He is nought to you. He never has done aught for you nor for your son. You are my wife, and I forbid you to speak of the man or see him. Do you hear? Do you understand?'

Chiara was a cowardly woman, and she was

frightened. The pressure of her husband's hands and the sound of his voice frightened her more than his words. She had not known him angry for so many years. She thought he was like a yoked and muzzled ox whom you may beat and prod at your will with your goad because he cannot turn.

She passed her tongue over her dry cracked lips, and rubbed her hands nervously against her thighs.

'Good Lord, Babbo, how you do take on!' she muttered, trying to smile. 'One would think you jealous, you silly old man!'

And she giggled a little, though she was trembling in her soul.

'Jealous, you fool!' echoed Abbondio. 'Go, look in your glass and see if man alive could be jealous of such a wreck as you! Go, look at your wrinkled throat and your sagging breast, and your yellow skin and your falling hair! Jealous! Once I was jealous—four-and-twenty years ago—and yet I did not kill you then—more's the pity!'

Chiara shook herself free of his hold, stung into momentary courage by the outrage of his

words. True she was all that he said, true the little rickety mirror in her room told her worse than he did; but no woman can endure the statement to her face of her lost looks. It made a fury of a white-livered timid creature. She shook with rage from head to foot, and hissed at him till she foamed at the mouth.

'A woman cannot live with a hind like you,' she screamed, 'and bear him children, and work in sun and rain and drought and snow, and starve on beans and bread and watered lees of wine, and yet keep the good looks which she was born with; 'tis not in reason nor in nature. But my boy has youth. My boy has beauty. My boy has health and strength and comeliness; and I tell you that before he is a week older his father, his real father, shall see him and know him, and be proud of him. He and I have suffered enough in your wretched hole. 'Tis time that our lots were changed and our board was spread!'

'You are mad, woman!' said Abbondio, as he stared at her in stupor and disgust. And she was for the moment mad, being drunk with the idea of her

old lover's return as on some fermenting liquor, and refusing to remember or admit for an instant the change in herself which she could not in reason deny.

'You are mad,' said Abbondio slowly again, contempt and pity alike moving him, as he looked on her wild, fevered, convulsed face, and her snapping eyelids from under which she darted fire at him. 'All I say to you is this, and you shall abide by it. You are my wife, and your eldest born passes as my son. I forbid either of you to have aught to say or to do with this man who you tell me is returned. You must know little of men, poor soul, to think that your news would be welcome to him, or your bastard either. But whether they would be or not, mind this, Chiara, mind this, no one out of my house goes to your undoer.'

'My undoer!' shrieked the woman, the foam of rage upon her lips. 'It was you who were my undoer, marrying me to a clod, setting me down to a mill ass's life, making me a beast of burden, to bear your children, and hoe your turnips, and bake your bread! I was the handsomest lass in the

country side. If I had been let alone I could have made my way to the cities or foreign countries and had a fortune in my face, and worn lace and lawn shifts, and lived on sweetmeats and cheese and stewed hares! It is you who have been my undoer, taking me before the mayor and the altar, to make a slave of me from sunrise to moonrise!'

Her husband looked at her, one long look, then turned away with a faint bitter smile upon his face. The stupendous ingratitude was too familiar to him, too common in her, to amaze him; its well-known odious shamelessness served rather as a calming drug to his own anger. It was so constant and so hateful that it sobered him. Was it worth while to spend breath and wrath on such a miserable thing as she? He shrugged his shoulders and went away to his work.

She thought that she had vanquished him. She had had the last word: the one sign of conquest so dear to women. She stood gasping for breath, her past terror and her present exultation seeming to clutch at her throat and stifle her.

Abbondio, as usual, returned to his work; he

had no leisure to spend on emotion. He was angry with himself for the heat with which he had spoken. He was an even-tempered man and of great patience, scarcely ever stirred out of his passive and silent acceptance of all things. He had long known that his wife was a poor, feckless, ungrateful, ill-conditioned creature, but he had made the best of a bad bargain; there had been nothing else left for him to do. He told himself now that he had been wrong to excite himself over this man's home-coming; what could it matter one way or another? What difference would it make? This poor vain fool supposed that a gentleman would believe her, and accept her son, and rejoice in his own paternity. But that was not the way of gentry; they were not apt to be so kind or so ready to remember their own levities. Poor silly jade! She only prepared chagrin and disappointment for herself. Of that he was sure, and yet the idea that this man was near was an irritation to him and an offence. Men of Abbondio's class are not sensitive; their feelings are stunted as their minds are by continuous and fatiguing labours. The elementary and instinctive

affections are all which stir in them, and they are more apt to be deeply moved by a cow's death, a bad crop, or a lost bargain, than by any sentiment or sorrow. Therefore, what he felt about this old lover of Chiara's coming nigh him was not what a man of culture and of leisure would have felt, but was a dull angry sense of offence and of an unbecoming liberty taken with him and his.

He had maintained the woman and the bastard all these many years in good seasons and in bad ones, and at the first hint that this man who had never done aught for them drew nigh the newcomer became their only thought.

'It is human nature, maybe,' said he to the soil as he turned it; 'but it is vile human nature.'

He had forbidden his wife to see the man, but how could he enforce his order? She was crafty and secretive; she had been so in a thousand little things, she would be so in a larger one. He could not spend his time in watching her, he was tied to the fields. Besides, she would have outwitted him if he had any amount of time. She and her son to-

gether backed each other up and screened one another, and helped and lied, and plotted and planned in mutual and never-failing amity. Had they not done so ever since the boy was small, and stole eggs and walnuts from the neighbours whilst his mother filched from her husband's trouser pockets to get means to stop those neighbours' angry mouths with gifts of tobacco or salt or coffee?

Had he not seen through it all, and been sick at heart for it, and powerless to help it, all these years, and would it not be the same thing over and over again so long as their lives should last? He was helpless; the reins had slipped from his hands somehow or other long, long ago, and he had never recovered them.

He was not a weak man either, only too placid and kind and yielding; and from the moment that he had condoned the woman's first and infamous offence against him he had been in a position in which it was as difficult to be firm as it is hard to walk straightly or quickly in a bog. A masterful man, an ungenerous man, or a cruel man would have made the woman pay, and pay heavily, every

hour of her life; but he was no one of these three things, and she had found that out very quickly, and the one sinned against was treated as the sinner.

A hard-working man can rule in his household if he rule by the fist; but if he be too forbearing to do that, he will have little authority, for he is too occupied and too fatigued to have time or wit for moral suasion or sharp argument. In the lives of the poor the roughest rule: the kind go to the wall, and fill their pipes with ashes. The ashes in his had been cold four-and-twenty years, and yet had power to blister his lips.

What should he do? he pondered as he worked this day: his work was nasty, repellent work; it was that of pouring the liquid manure over the roots of the freshly sprouted broccoli and cauliflowers. There is a law which forbids this work to be done between sunrise and sunset; but no peasant in the land ever heeds the law. The human fæces are carted over the fields in barrels, rudely and ineffectively closed with wisps of straw, and the stench steams up from the soil in the heat of the sun when the

contents of the barrels are poured out on the earth. The sickly odour entered his nostrils and his throat, and stung them as if it were a swarm of bees; it clung to his hands and infected his clothes; he would never get rid of it for hours to come. This filth had not been used in his young days; the dung of the stables had been enough for the soil then. The ground had grown greedy and beastly like men; nay, it was not the ground which was greedy, it was only men. The ground was willing enough to bring forth the vegetables in its own due time, without bribe or nostrum; but men wanted the green things earlier than their time, quicker than it was their nature to be, and so drenched the soil with ordure to compass that end. He did it because others did it, because the overseer ordered it to be done; but he did not like it any more than he liked the copper poison for the vines, or any other of the stinking novelties with which the fields were worried and tortured from one Corpus Domini to another.

His eldest son Rufo was working with him, and spoke to him several times without getting

any reply. At last the young man said impatiently, 'Are you deaf, Babbo?'

Abbondio looked up like a man awakened out of sleep.

'What did you say, lad?'

Rufo answered impatiently, 'I asked you three times if it be true, Babbo, that this land is going to change owners.'

'I have heard nought,' answered his father. 'What have you heard?'

'Babbo, you live like a hedgehog under a heap of dead leaves,' said the lad roughly. ''Tis well known, I believe, that Ausano, of Affiorelli, is going to buy it because it marches with his, and he buys Rossi's and Filippini's too.'

Rossi and Filippini were the peasants to right and left of them.

'Who told you?' asked Abbondio.

'Celso told me; but I spoke of it to the Rossi's Gian, and he said it was true.'

'Well, well, it will not matter much to us. What matters it to the horse which drags the cart what man sits atop?'

'Aie, aie, Babbo!' said Rufo, shaking his head; 'the man atop holds the whip.'

Rufo was a good lad by nature, but he had imbibed Celso's view of his father as of one who was never to be agreed with or listened to, and who was good only for work, as the oxen were.

'The man atop holds the whip.'

'Yes, that was true enough,' thought Abbondio.

He went on with his work, feeling the smart and stench of the filth in his throat, and a tight ligature of apprehension tied, as it were, round his heart.

Rufo knew nothing more of Ausano than that he was a rich man owning the large adjacent estates called collectively Affiorelli, an absentee who had never been seen in the province for a score of years or more. Celso and his mother kept their own counsel and did not part with their secrets. A secret shared is a treasure squandered.

'You don't say anything, Babbo?' cried Rufo impatiently. 'You are always as mum as a felled tree.'

'What will be will be,' said Abbondio, lifting a

barrel of filth on his shoulders. ''Twill make no manner of difference to us. Castellani have been on the soil four hundred years and more, and will be here when you and I are dead and gone.'

'Lord, Babbo! you are an old owl!' said Rufo with a grin. 'Why, were not there the Lanza folk on that Brancaleone place and their people had been on the ground seven hundred years, if one, for the old ledgers up at the lord's villa proved it; and yet when the candle-maker came and bought the estate were they not kicked out in a year's time, the whole lot of them, without either by your leave or for your leave, and don't you see old Pippo Lanza begging his bread along the roads? I saw old Pippo myself eight days ago, and he had not a shirt to his back.'

'Lanza is Lanza: Castellani is Castellani,' said Abbondio doggedly. 'I don't wish to say ill of anyone, and 'tis for no man to judge another, but the Lanza were thriftless folk and let the land go hungry and poor.'

'Maybe,' said the lad as obstinately; 'but all

the same, it shows that length of tenure counts for nought when a new owner has a mind to turn out a family. You had better see to it by times, Babbo, and try and get speech with this gentleman ; and speak him fair when you do see him.'

The youngster had no knowledge how his words stung and wounded the hearer in their boyish conceit of counsel, and he was frightened when his father turned a pale stern face towards him across the pile of manure barrels.

'When I want your advice, my dear, I will ask for it. One prater and counsellor is enough in a family. Celso need not set you to preach for him. He has gab enough of his own. Unload those barrels quick, and take the donkey uphill, and cart the faggots I showed you home.'

Rufo, grumbling and offended, nevertheless obeyed, and hauled the little casks down one by one ; then, with loud noise and cracking of his whip as though he were driving a team of waggon horses, he dragged the little donkey up the steep ruts in the grass path under the maples.

Left alone, Abbondio took off his hat for a

moment, and passed his hand in a bewildered way over his thick grey hair.

It had never entered his head in all the years of his life that Castellani could ever go off the soil of Filibrana. In old days land seldom changed hands unless by the fortunes of war; but nowadays land is chaffered and bid for at auctions as if it were a brass pot or an earthen pipkin. That he knew. With a great gasp as he realised the veracity of his son's officiously proffered information, he put his hat on his head once more, and stooped and heaved a cask on to his shoulder. The sweat of his body and limbs turned to cold water as the mere possibility of eviction dawned on him. Of course Rufo had been right. When the land changes owners it may change the dwellers on it too. Custom, indeed, does make the soil almost copyhold to the peasants on it, but there is no obligation on the purchaser to abide by that custom. Though he had said hard things of the Lanza folk he knew that his own farm was often hungry and poor, and was not tilled as it had been in his father's time. He himself worked early and late, worked like an

ox, and was a sage and capable husbandman; but he had little assistance. His boys were made indolent and idle by the example and the jeering injunctions of Celso. The girls were vain, and shirked work when they could. There was only Bina who was industrious. He could not afford to take on hired men at busy seasons, so that often what was done had to be done a month too late; and that means much mischief and much loss in the fields.

His own eldest son (passing as the second son) was serving his time in the army; his eldest daughter he had given in marriage to a farrier on the opposite hills; the rest were all under twenty, the girls the youngest. The land fed them, which it could afford to do, but it had also to clothe them, and that was a heavy cost. Certainly, they worked in a measure in return for their cost, but they did not work as he and his brothers and sisters had worked when in their teens. Their heart was not in their labour, and they shirked it when they could. On a farm, unless everyone works, from the five-year-old child who minds the poultry and carries the cut grass, things go ill upon it.

Unless learned young, the labour of the fields is never well done, the sinews do not grow to it. It is only habit from earliest years which can inure the labourer to bear the burning rays of a July sun all the day long on scorched unshaded plains, or, unharmed, carry wet feet through dawn to dusk in the clay and mud of the furrows in late December.

Men of his class are generally burdened with debt. Their women for the most part run them into it; the women buy on credit from the pedlars on the roads and the shop people in any near village. The marriage outfits are costly and usually got upon credit, and money is borrowed in advance on the crops, on the vintage, on the cattle.

Abbondio had never been in debt for a penny in all his life, but ofttimes his wife and her daughters were, and it crippled him to pay, as he always did pay, when their liabilities came to his knowledge. With thrifty women he would have been a well-to-do man, but with spendthrift ones he was always kept poor.

He knew that a rigorous judge of agriculture

would find much to complain of at Filibrana as it was now ordered and cultivated, though he toiled and moiled and sweated and aged himself, in the effort to make two hands do the work of six.

Would he ever be like old Pippo Lanza, begging his bread in a ragged shirt along the highways and byways?

As he worked in the great heavy heat which succeeds the setting of the sun, a sudden light flashed in on him, the lurid light of suspicion.

Chiara or Celso had set this lad on to sound and to frighten him, so that, made malleable through apprehension, he might condone their intended appeals to the new-comer. Yes: he saw it plainly enough now.

It would never have come into Rufo's stupid head to talk so glibly and to speak of the Lanza whose eviction had taken place when he had been a little curly-headed trot of three or four years old, unless his mother and his brother had primed him with his lesson and egged him on to his recital of it. It was clear enough.

The thing they had done in little a thousand times they were now doing, and would do, in a greater matter. Chiara and Celso never did aught openly, or by straightforward methods: it was not their way. Their brains were small and narrow and undeveloped, but they worked in spiral convolutions like some projectiles, and always hit their mark.

On the following Sunday he put aside his own anxieties and sorrows and paid his promised visit to the father of Bina's suitor, a good pleasant soul living on the edge of the pine woods in air as fine as any which blew in Christendom. The two men talked long and amicably, and agreed after repeated discussion upon every point that the union would suit everyone concerned. The marriage was as good as concluded. They settled everything in full and minute detail, and parted cordially as the sunset burned behind the serried ridges of the tall stone-pines.

Nattalino was to be apprised of his good fortune on his return from a cattle fair, to which he had gone, and was to be free to make his first courting

visits upon that day week. It cost Abbondio a wrench to settle this, for he knew that he should miss the little bright bird of a Bina long and painfully from his household. But it was time the child should have a home of her own, and she would be well placed here where the men were kind, the women few, and the freedom of the upper hills just the life which she would choose.

The bells were sounding for vespers from the grey towers and white belfries of the village churches along each side of the river as he descended the hill-road after this momentous interview. He felt that he had done rightly, done wisely; and that knowledge brought peacefulness with it. Although to send Bina from under his roof was like stopping up the one entry by which sunshine could come into his house, he knew that he had no business to sacrifice the child to his own want of her.

Generous people have always a glow at their hearts when they have acted generously, and he was content with himself as he went down the steep slopes between the bilberries and the furze, with

here and there a hare scudding through the maidenhair fern at his feet, and a peregrine falcon sailing round his head. He knew every line of the landscape, below, above, and around him. In those twenty square miles which his eyes could scan lay all his little world. He had never been farther afield since his birth. Filibrana fronted him, on the other bank of the river, lying low on a cultured hillside; where he was now the hills were wild.

As he looked down on its distant roofs, red, grey, and brown, amidst the green of its walnuts and mulberries, a sudden fear shot through him like a spasm of pain. Would his lengthened absence on this Sunday afternoon have given his wife the occasion which, no doubt, she watched for, to do that which he had forbidden her to do?

'Like enough! like enough!' he said to himself.

He had never thought of that when he had taken his stick, and his best hat, and whistled to his little red dog, and gone up through the bracken to the woods, where so many a day in his boyhood

he had gone mushroom-hunting and birds'-nesting in the chestnut scrub and under the great tall chequered trunks of the stone-pines.

'Like enough, like enough, she had betaken herself there!'

As he went down the hill he was overtaken by his neighbour Rossi, jingling and rolling along in his rickety two-wheeled pony cart. Rossi offered him a lift, for their farms ran together.

As they drove along down the steep road, with the river and the fields lying within their sight below, Rossi said to him:

'Well, what think you of this change of masters? Shall we have to pack? Some say so, but I doubt it. 'Tis the custom to keep on old families—'tis almost the law.'

'Is it true, then?' asked Abbondio, startled and aghast. 'Is it true the whole estate is sold?'

'Lord's sake! are you deaf that you ask it? Up and down the river for five miles folks talk of nothing else. You see we run cheek by jowl, as one may say, with Affiorelli; 'tis but natural he should buy if he can.'

'Is he a man well esteemed?' asked Abbondio, in a changed voice.

'Eh, nobody knows; he has never been nigh the place four-and-twenty years. It won't make a straw's worth of difference to us, I should think, for Il Brutto takes service under him, so we shall be neither better nor worse.'

Il Brutto (the ugly one) was the nickname, not given in love, by which the overseer of the Filibrana property was known behind his back to all those who had any acquaintance with him.

'But is the sale signed?' asked Abbondio anxiously.

''Twas signed yesterday down in the town.'

'Then is this Ausano here already?'

'Ay, he is at his villa.'

Abbondio's heart sank. What a simpleton he had been to go so far away all the Sunday afternoon; beyond a doubt his wife had profited by his absence.

'What a mumchance he is!' thought old Rossi, who liked a cheery gossip, regretting his own good nature in having offered the lift to so dull a companion.

It was dark when he reached home. There was no one there; the family had left the house to take care of itself. It is a careless, confident way which they have in those parts, and the result is often stolen straw, filched vegetables, and robbed henroosts.

First of all there strayed in Nilla, and Ciccia, and Vina, with their suitors, the sons of neighbours. The girls were busked and braided, stiffened and smartened in festal attire, and only tossed their heads when their father reproved them for leaving the house.

'Where is your mother?' he asked them.

'Mother is out,' said Petronilla indifferently.

'She went out at three,' said Vina. 'She didn't say where she was going, but she borrowed the jacket Aunt Agnes gave me, and she put on the coral earrings.'

Abbondio did not need to ask any more; he knew as well as if he had followed her, step by step, whither his wife had gone.

The girls sat about on the benches in front of the house with the youths, cracking fresh walnuts, for it was St. Lorenzo's day. Abbondio looked at

them and let them be; he stripped off his coat, turned his trousers up to the knee, and tied on a blue apron, then lighted a lanthorn, and went to the stables to milk the cows, and feed the mule and the ass. The milking was work which properly belonged to the girls, but on Sundays or feast days they were too fine to do it, and could not bend their tight-laced bodies. The milk taken in the evening was set aside in a cool cellar and sent into the town as fresh milk with that of the following morning. Few people in the town knew enough about milk to find out the difference. He had filled a zinc pail from the first patient creature, and was moving his stool to the second, when he saw a figure hasten past the open doorway as though endeavouring to avoid observation. It was the figure of his wife wearing Vina's little smart blue jacket and having a black lace veil on her head. Her big eyes flashed furtively upon him as she hurried past. He did not try to stop her. He knew what her errand had been, and it was no use to make her tell more of those innumerable lies which such women as she manufacture as quickly as they plait their split straws.

He went on with his milking, his sad and troubled thoughts at work in him like fermenting yeast. When he had milked the fourth and last cow there came over the uneven stones outside a rush of two quick feet, and the voice of Bina, eloquent of self-reproach, cried to him:

'Oh, Babbo dear, forgive me! I am so sorry I am so late. Pray—pray forgive me!'

'I always forgive you, little one,' said Abbondio with his slow kind smile. 'But I never knew you truant before; and the house left empty too. You know how I dislike that. Where have you been?'

Bina busied herself with the headstall of the cow, so that her face was hidden from him.

'I was at the crossroads waiting for Celso,' she said honestly and timidly. 'He promised to come back and take me to San Gristoforo to eat walnuts. I have waited under the cypresses ever since four, and it is now avemmaria.'

'If you trust to Celso's promises you will wait longer for their fulfilment than for many an avemmaria,' said her uncle. 'What did I tell you the other day? Have nought to do with Celso.'

'But he said he would be back at four,' murmured Bina, with tears in her voice.

'But he has found something which amuses him better than eating walnuts at San Gristoforo, and so he lets you fret your little heart out by the cross-roads! Surely you, who have been brought up with him, should know his selfishness.'

Abbondio shouldered the great copper vessel in which he had poured the milk, and with his lanthorn in one hand walked across the court and down the steep stone stairs of the cellar. Bina followed him with a similar vessel on her shoulder; in her vexation at her spoilt tryst she forgot that she had her Sunday frock on and would damage it.

The cellar was a great cool place smelling of wine, because the wine vats stood in it, and lighted by a grated window, through which a wild pumpkin had pushed itself with its yellow flowers.

When they had set the milk on the ground, Abbondio laid his hand on her arm to detain her.

'You know I love you, Bina?'

'Yes, Babbo, I do.'

'Then believe that I speak for your good. You

are dear to me, too dear my daughters say, but that is nonsense; I never wrong them for you. When your father lay dying he gave you to me—a little fat curlyheaded dumb thing—and I have always tried to do well by you.'

'Indeed you have, Babbo.'

She was trembling for fear of what was coming, and from the consciousness of what she hid from him.

'Now,' continued her uncle, keeping his hold on the bright blue sleeve of her Sunday frock, 'it is not well that you should go to eat walnuts with Celso, or to do anything else with him. Celso will never mean any good to you. So put him out of your head, and face a fair future. I have been up to Palmarolo this afternoon, and have arranged your marriage with Nattalino Fe. You will be happy then, my little girl; they are all good people, and the youngster is honest and sober and laborious, and has good looks too, which counts more with women than all the virtues.'

Bina was mute.

'You need not tell the girls yet unless you like,'

added Abbondio. 'Nattalino will come over next Sunday and begin the courtship. 'Twill be time enough to tell them then. You are not smiling, Bina? Cannot you trust my choice? My dear, it is not waiting at the crossroads for a youth who amuses himself elsewhere that makes a maiden happy. 'Tis a good man and a good home, and savings enough to keep the cradle warm when it is tenanted, and the bread hutch and the soup pot well filled. You are a wise little woman, Bina. When you tell your beads to-night thank the Madonna that she has given you a betrothed who is not a rake or a coxcomb or a brute.'

Then he patted the girl on the shoulder, kissed her on each cheek, and went up the cellar stairs. He had many women in his family, but he had not learned enough of their sex to know that he had taken the surest way in the world to make the young man whom he had chosen odious to a girl already enamoured with another person.

Nor did it occur to him that Bina would fail to accept his choice. The ways of his class are still patriarchal in much, and in nothing more so

than in the authority of the head of the house in all matters matrimonial.

Moreover his mind was occupied with a worse anxiety. When Chiara came down to supper she had an odd look; her eyes flashed hither and thither nervously, and her thin cheeks had a feverish colour; she talked loudly and rapidly, she laughed meaninglessly and often, and she had an expression defiant and timorous, which did not reveal to him whether she had been successful in her errand or whether she was merely obstinate, and triumphant in having disobeyed him and deceived him.

On the whole, it seemed to him that she must have been well received at Affiorelli.

The supper was noisy, for besides the girls' suitors there were two other young men, and all the Castellani lads except Celso. They had cabbage soup and a hare stewed with fennel, and all the young people and the mother were so mirthful that none noticed Bina's silence: to their father's seriousness they were used. Usually they were all abed by nine; but the suitors did not take their

leave till half-past ten, and it was eleven when Abbondio fastened up the doors.

'Celso is out!' screamed his wife; it was the first word she had spoken to him. 'Celso is out! Leave the key down.'

Abbondio put the great key in his pocket.

'He can sleep in the hayloft, as he has done other nights. He sleeps in worse places by his own choice.'

Without looking at his wife, he climbed the ladder-like stair which led to the garret under the roof, occupied for many years by himself and his two younger sons. Chiara looked after him with vicious malevolence.

'One day my darling shall lock you out, you clod!' she muttered under her breath.

It was nothing new; he had invariably refused to allow the door to be opened after ten to Celso, returning from riotous evenings in village or town.

Nor was it anything uncommon, for every head of a household throughout the district was equally strict in this respect. But this evening it seemed

to his wife an enormity. The doors should have stood open all the night, and lighted oil wicks have flamed in the brass lamp, and a flask of wine have waited on the table for the entry of her firstborn.

'Well, well, his turn will come if we have but patience,' she said to her impatient and ungrateful soul, as she, too, climbed the stair, to bed, but not to sleep, for through her silly brain there flocked in dizzy gyration innumerable visions of unspeakable prosperity and withering vengeance.

She had always disliked her husband, as the betrayer dislikes the betrayed, and after what he had said concerning her appearance, her hatred of him was without measure. Being a vain woman, she had brought herself to believe that, if she had not accepted his suit, she would have made some good marriage; if her lover had not married her himself, he would have found her some good marriage to a tradesman, or a steward, or a doctor, to somebody with whom she could have enjoyed life, and dressed like a lady. As nothing is easier than for the ungrateful to forget, she ignored totally the terror of exposure, which had made the oppor-

tune suit of an honest man seem like a haven of refuge, and shut her eyes to the subsequent goodness of her husband, and the generosity with which he had always forborne to twit her with her past.

She had gone up to Affiorelli that day dressed in her best, and consequently looking her worst. She did not even tell her Celso where she went, though she had talked the theme over and over again with him.

Affiorelli was high up in the oak woods of the hill on whose side lay Filibrana: a grey, sombre, castellated house, built in a triangular shape by knights templars, and having a tower at each corner of the angle. Its bastions and gates were perfectly preserved, and round it was an old garden with high clipped arbutus hedges, and cypresses and cedars five centuries old if one. She had never been up to it before, since naturally it had not been there that her meetings with the young soldier had taken place. She met no one on the way; she was prepared to explain if she did meet anyone that she was going to entreat the new master not to turn her family out of Filibrana. It was always well to take time by

the forelock, 'and,' she meant also to say, 'my good man is so mum and so shy, he would never speak a word to a stranger if he died for want of it.'

However, these carefully studied speeches were not spoken, for she saw not a soul on the road except a boy with birdlime and osier cages. Arrived at the house her heart quaked within her at sight of its greatness and formidable frowning architecture, but she went in between the open doors into a hall lofty and vaulted, with old marble busts and dark old nameless paintings. She had with her the propitiatory basket of eggs, without which no peasant ever pays a visit to a superior; she made herself very humble and cringing and sweet-voiced as she asked a servant in shirt sleeves if she could see the master.

'Sit down and wait, wife,' said the man roughly; 'he is at dinner.'

She sat down under one of the great black solemn pictures. Her heart was beating fast and faintly with fear. If after all she should not be recognised!

The great hall was grim and gloomy, though the

gay summer sun poured through it; grey dust was everywhere on the sculptures and carvings; it had been uninhabited so long that there was a musty, mouldy smell, no one had ever opened the high windows for ten years. She waited what seemed to her an eternity, her basket on her knee, and her hands clasped upon its handle. Some pointers and setters came and smelt at her and growled a little, then went back to the kitchens, whence a strong rich smell of cooking came down a long vaulted stone passage.

At last, another servant, also in shirt sleeves, beckoned to her. 'He will see you, but you must be quick.'

Chiara, with a sinking courage and a shaking nerve, went into the dining room, another large grim vaulted place. A mist swam before her eyes. When it cleared away she heard a man's voice speaking to her, and she saw a stout, bald, florid person, flushed red after good wine and a rich repast, and lolling back in a big tapestried chair. As she looked at him she gave a little gasp and cried, 'O Lord! O Lord!' Forgetful of the pass-

ing of time and its cruel work, she had expected to see the slender winsome bright-eyed soldier whom she had known twenty-five years before with a cheek like a peach, and limbs slim and straight as young pine trees. Then, and then only, did she realise what change there must be in herself.

'What ails you, woman?' asked Ausano, astonished and displeased. 'You are one of the Filibrana people, they tell me. Say what you have to say, good wife, and quickly.'

She could only gasp for breath, and the eggs in her basket rattled with the trembling of her hands. She could not take her eyes off him, the bald, fat, red-visaged, big-bellied man.

'Heaven and earth! don't stare like that, woman,' he said irritably. 'You come to beg, of course. Say what you want, and I will consider it.'

Then Chiara, forgetting all her studied orations, broke down in a burst of genuine tears.

'Oh, don't you remember me?' she sobbed. 'Why, I am Chiara!'

'Chiara?' He repeated the name two or three times. It said nothing to him whatever.

'Oh, don't you remember me, sir?' she cried again, and now with a certain indignation. 'Time was when Chiara seemed all in all to you; and you would steal down at night, as quiet as a fox, and climb up the old apple tree, and in at my window in a jiffy; and not one of my folks knew or dreamt. And away you went, as the gentry always do, and left me with child, and never cared; and me so miserable and affrighted as never was; and a beautiful babe he came, and a fine man he is, the moral of what you were in that time, sir; and proud you will be of him if only you will see him, sir—Celso, as I named him, sir, after you.'

Ausano listened, dumb with astonishment and the confusing effort to remember things totally obliterated from his memory.

It was not at all what she had meant to say; but all her carefully meditated speeches had been scattered to the winds by her amazement at the sight of this stout and florid man, who had no trace of any past beauty in his swollen and inflamed features, and who scarcely even looked a gentleman, hot and heavy as he was, and clothed in a rough

shooting suit, with breeches and gaiters, as he had come in from the woods.

'Chiara? Chiara?' he repeated again, and then the mention of the old apple tree brought some ray of recollection with it. Little by little, very far away and returning to him by piecemeal, came some vague memories of that time. Little by little she revealed the face and form of that maiden for whom he had climbed the apple tree on moonless nights. Good heavens! Could this lean, brown, unlovely woman be she? He stared at her, moved by the same amazement and incredulity which he had aroused in her; and as he noted her braided jacket, her coral earrings, her effort to seem young and pretty, a cruel laughter overcame him at the thought that this scarecrow was trying to warm the ashes of dead passions. He laughed long and uncontrollably, whilst she, stung to the quick, bit her lips to keep back the caustic, imprudent words which panted for utterance on her tongue. Recovering himself, and a little ashamed, he said to her:

'I am sorry if I hurt you. I did not recollect

It is so long ago. But you are married—my servant said, the wife of Castellani?'

'Yes, I married, sir,' answered Chiara, aware that the fact spoilt her cause. 'When fine gentry leave poor girls alone with their burden they have to do what they can to save their names. I married Abbondio, of Filibrana, a poor, feckless, stupid soul, for whom I have worked like a horse, and who has made me the wreck you see, sir. Small matter that, were he only grateful; but there! Men are all alike! If only he did justice to my poor, beautiful boy—your boy, sir—why, indeed, one would bear the rest.'

'Does your husband know?'

'Holy Mary, sir! Am I a woman to wed with a man and not tell him all beforehand?'

'I should think you were entirely capable of that and of very much worse,' thought Ausano as he said aloud: 'It is natural enough that your husband should not love your boy. By the bye, if true what you say, he must be out of boyhood. It is a score of years since I was here.'

'He is four-and-twenty come All Saints' Day,

sir; and if you will honour him and me by looking here, sir, you will see he is the very image of what you were, sir, then, if it be not a liberty of me to say so.'

And she took from under her eggs a photograph of Celso.

It had been done by an artist who spent the summer in the neighbourhood, and had often paid Celso to sit to him as a model. It was, therefore, well and picturesquely taken, and showed the fine torso of the young man bare, and his gladiator-like close-curled head undisfigured by head gear or barber.

Ausano took it, and looked at it for some moments.

He could not but admit to himself that it was very like what he had been at the same age. Although the woman inspired him with distrust and dislike, he gave credence to her story. She was a cringing, cunning hussy, that he could see, but the probability was that her story was true.

'Anyhow,' he thought with a smile, 'she is more

apologetic and less exacting than women of a higher class in similar positions.'

He sat thinking with the photograph on the palm of his hand.

He had been a spendthrift in his youth, and now was inclined to avarice. He was old for his years; he had led a coarse life, and drunk heavily, though he always carried a cool head.

He was a man quick to see his own advantage in anything; he perceived, as he looked at the photograph, that the original was most probably a son of his own. Might not such a one prove of use to him if employed on the land as a spy and a tool? Would it not be easy to turn this concealed relationship into some solid and profitable use?

His wife was a hypochondriac, always wandering from one foreign bath to another, and his only children were two girls being educated in a convent. He had nobody with him to prevent his doing whatever he chose. But he was wary and suspicious, and committed himself to no promises. He gave her back the portrait.

'A fine lad,' he said indifferently; 'you may send him to see me next Sunday at this hour if you like.'

Chiara's eyes flushed with cunning rapture.

'Have you told the young man what you tell me?' asked Ausano, looking at her fixedly.

She hesitated, trying to read in his face how she would best frame her answer so as to most please him and most benefit herself. She could not, however, read anything; and being in doubt lied, a lie being always more safe than the truth.

'I have never said a syllable about his birth to him, your excellency,' she said eagerly: so eagerly that Ausano immediately knew she was lying. 'But I fear that my husband has girded at him and thrown it in his teeth, for Abbondio cannot endure him, sir, which is cruelly unjust to the innocent.'

'That is natural enough under the circumstances,' said Ausano, with a smile; 'that is to say,' he added, correcting himself, 'if what you tell me be true. You have given me no proof of its truth.'

Chiara fell a-weeping.

'Lord's sake! illustrious gentleman, what proof

could a poor maiden, as I was when you knew me, have of her child's parentage? Poor girls are mere wayside thistles, as one may say, and the gentry are the birds as just swoop down and pluck at them and then fly away on both wings over hill and dale. Proof have I none, sir, except such as may lie in your excellency's own recollection and in the blessed face of my own dearly loved son.'

Sobbing she fell at his feet, and kissed his gaiters.

'Get up, woman,' said Ausano with genuine disgust. 'And mind you, I do not say that I believe your tale; but if your son please me I will, maybe, do something for him for sake of old acquaintance. Your husband is on my land since yesterday, when I purchased Filibrana.'

'Leave your eggs,' he added, 'and here is a *mancia* to buy yourself a winter gown.'

He took a hundred-franc note out of his purse, and held it out to her.

Then rather roughly he pushed her away from his feet, and motioned towards the door. He thought her odious, and pitied the husband, but he wished to

judge for himself of Celso. Chiara, with tears of joy running down her cheeks, went through the serving men and the dogs into the open air hugging her red banknote.

She had never possessed so much money in all her life; the very little which she could ever call her own being the few pence she made by her straw-plaiting and the sale of the scanty eggs which her thin hens laid. She was all on fire with her triumph; the part of her reception which had been mortifying and wounding to her personally was more than outbalanced by the practical side of its success. Sentiment had had nothing whatever to do with the hopes which she had cherished, and therefore, though her self-love had been rudely offended, she yet readily forgave that for sake of the material good which she had obtained, and the increased advantages which she foresaw. Who goes softly goes soundly, she thought, in the words of the aphorism. If she and her boy were but prudent and patient, all which they desired, but scarcely dared to dream of, might be brought about with time. She was an ignorant woman, silly in

many things and of narrow, untilled mind, but she was shrewd wherever her own interests lay, and she could plot and plan and weave and work with a consummate skill like a spider's, and her untrained instincts discerned character with an unerring accuracy. She saw that the new lord of Filibrana was at once suspicious and credulous, indolent and inquisitive, obstinate and weak; influence once obtained over him, he might be led by a thread.

She met her son waiting for her where the group of cypresses stood together over a little stone bridge and a shrine to the Madonna.

'Well?' he asked breathlessly.

She set his anxiety at rest with a highly coloured narrative of her interview: a glowing picture, full of high lights and softened shadows.

'And you are to go and see him this day week at this hour,' she said proudly. 'He is longing to embrace you; he has no son of his wife's. Oh, my precious darling, only be careful and prudent, and your fortune is already made!'

Celso's face fell; he had expected to be led up immediately in triumph to the castle.

'What money did he give you?' he asked sullenly. 'Surely we don't wait for that till this day se'nnight?'

'Money, my love!' said his mother reproachfully. 'Do you think, my treasure, there was any question of money to-day, when he and I met after all these cruel years? Willingly and joyfully would I have have brought you some, but he gave no sign, and I could not begin to beg first day of seeing him; it would have spoiled all. Patience, dearie, patience, and you will see plenty of money come out of this afternoon's happy work for you. But first of all and ever you must not let him think that you have any eye to gain from him.'

Celso grinned from ear to ear, his full-lipped mouth like a pomegranate pulled asunder.

'Don't laugh, dearie,' said his mother, much distressed. 'One can't make anybody else believe a thing unless one acts as though one believed it oneself. He is a kind gentleman and a fine one, but he is sharp, and if he thinks we want to gain from him——'

'He must be a precious fool if he thinks any-

thing else,' said Celso. 'And you swear that he gave you no money at all?'

He looked at her with his black eyes hard as flint and penetrating as gimlets, until she felt as if he must see through her jacket and her bodice the banknote which lay between her shift and the busk of her leathern stays.

'No money, love,' she said unflinchingly. 'And, very first day of meeting, I could not ask.'

'Curse him for a blackguardly skinflint!' swore Celso. 'Sure any gentleman should give his old fancy girl a handful of gold pieces. If I thought you lied to me, you infernal old comedian, I would twist your scraggy neck as you twist a chicken's!'

The blood turned to ice in her veins with a mortal fear, but she answered readily, 'And rightly would you deal with me, boy, if I could keep a stiver of your own father's money away from you.'

'If you haven't any money, then give me these, for money I must have for to-night in the town.'

He plucked roughly with each hand at her coral earrings. He had long coveted them. She

screamed, for his grasp was rough, and twisted the lobes of her ears.

'Oh, Celso! Celso!' she sobbed, 'never would you do me such a shame! If the neighbours see me without my best earrings on feast days they will think I have pawned them. Oh! the saints have mercy on me! Let go! Let go!'

He paid no heed to her cries, but continued to twist the hooks of the trinkets in her ears.

'Give me what the man up yonder gave you, or I will pull these out as sure as you live!'

'Wait, wait, wait!' she cried, trembling with terror and rage. 'I will give them to you, my angel. Did ever your poor old mother refuse you aught?

With shaking hands she unhooked the little baubles, and with tears and sobs and protestations, which made no impression on him, took the pretty tinkling bells out of her ears. She would far sooner have parted with the banknote, but she did not dare to confess to him that she had lied. A liar never forgives a lie told to him. Her heart was rent in twain to part with her coral bells, but she did not dare, after her earnest declarations that she had

been sent away empty-handed, let her son know of that hidden money in her bosom. What would she not have given now that she had brought the bank-note straightway to him as a present from Ausano? He might even have kissed her in return for it!

He took the trinkets from her rudely and without a word of thanks; his expectations had been raised to such a pitch of excitement regarding the issue of her visit, that the mere permission to present himself in eight days' time was as wine sadly tempered by the water barrel.

He ran downhill at full speed, leaving his mother pitiful as a shorn sheep in the middle of the road. He did not even look at her. He knew he would get little on the earrings. It was Sunday, the pawning establishments were shut, and the jewellers' and other shops in the town all closed. As he ran to catch the rickety omnibus which passed the road a mile farther down on its way to the town gates, he thought with an unkind laugh of Bina, who was innocently awaiting him at the trysting place in the full certainty that he would take her up at sunset to eat walnuts with her cousins at San Gristoforo.

'It will teach her not to be coy and so hard to tame,' he thought. 'She will find out that a man like me does not waste his time on a little prude, but goes elsewhere.'

And he ran on down the hill as fast as his Sunday clothes and the boots, to which his feet were unaccustomed, would allow him to do.

Chiara stood in the middle of the road, wailing and crying awhile for her lost treasures. Then she dried her eyes and went homeward. What were a couple of coral earrings in comparison with the land flowing with milk and honey which she had surveyed that afternoon?

She slipped her hand inside her stays and felt the crisp banknote with ecstasy. It would not be her fault if many of its fellows did not come to her and her son.

She hoped to hang the donor to her girdle as she hung her bundle of plaiting straw. So her eye shone with triumph as she flashed past her husband in the cowshed.

Up at the villa she had felt a little mortified and crestfallen despite her gratification; but, now

that she was down again at the farm, the humbler and more modest feeling wore away, and the triumphant sense of successful achievement and coming aggrandisement remained alone, lord of her bosom. Celso did not come home all night, and Bina cried herself to sleep, despite the good marriage arranged for her by her uncle.

With dawn she was up and in the cow's byre, and when the sun was high Celso swaggered up the garden path, and staggered up the stone staircase to his bed.

In the middle of the week a neighbour said to Abbondio:

'I saw your good wife going up to Affiorelli last Sunday. I suppose she went to ask the new owner's favour; but surely he can want nobody better than you on his land.'

Abbondio muttered some phrase unintelligibly, and plodded on his way; he was driving a cow to the butcher.

His worst fears were confirmed. What could he do? Nothing. He had commanded; but he could not enforce his command. He had threat-

ened; but he could not carry out his threat. Some men might, perhaps, have found a way to do so, but he could not.

He had submitted too long to his inferiors, which is the most emasculating and enfeebling of all kinds of servitude, because it has not even in it that show of reason, that solace as of the inevitable and the excusable, which accompany obedience to what is superior.

The following Sunday he saw Celso come down the hill of Affiorelli. He had a proud grin on his face, he swung a cane in his hand, he swaggered with his hat on one side of his head, he looked like a cock who has beaten its fellows and struts alone before the barn door.

The older man met him purposely by the bridge under the cypresses.

'A word with you,' he said gravely.

'Eh, Babbo?' cried the youth with surprise. 'What is up? Cannot we talk at home?'

'We talk best where none overhear. Cease to call me your father; I am nothing to you.'

Celso grinned and tossed his head as one who

would say: 'Can the blood horse be born of the plough ass?'

'You have known that a long time,' said Abbondio, 'but you have been glad to live on me, and profit by my toil and that of my children. You have been an idler, a rake, a scoundrel, a drone in the hive, a curse to me and mine. I have borne with you not to make shame for your mother. But now there is one thing I will not bear. You have been to the man who is your father. I will have no coming and going between my house and his. If you touch his silver or gold you cease to use my pewter and horn. If you go under his roof you go out from under mine. That is what I had to say.'

Celso stared. It seemed as strange to him as though he had heard a hare sit up and preach, or a sheep rebuke its flock.

'Eh, eh, old man!' he answered, with a jeering laugh. 'You tune your strings mighty high. What authority have you over me?'

'That which comes from having fed you, housed you, worked for you four-and-twenty years, you

thankless braggart; more fool I, as now I see. I am the head of my house, I am the husband of your mother, and I tell you now and once for all, choose between me and the man up yonder. I will not maintain you a day longer if you traffic and toady with him.'

'Body of Bacchus!' shouted Celso, 'you dare take that tone to me, you wretched earthworm, who are only good for drilling and draining the soil you sweat on? I am a noble, a gentleman!'

'You are a bye-blow,' said Abbondio, with calm scorn. 'Had I done right I should have flung you in the water tank as soon as you saw light. But I do not want to bandy words with you. Only this I say: if you and your mother have commerce with the man up yonder, out of my doors you go. Nay, you may rage and fume and curse. I do not fear your threats. You are a drunkard and a lecherous low liver—such as you have no terrors for me.'

Then steadily and gravely, as was his usual manner, he turned away and left the younger man convulsed with fury, foaming at the mouth, and striking the air madly with his little cane. He was

a hectoring bully, but he was a coward also, and he no more dared in that moment to lay his hand on his mother's husband than he would have dared to touch the back of a growling mastiff or the lowered horns of a bull. Moreover, he had other means and other ways of vengeance.

'If one of us two go out of the house,' he thought, 'it will not be Celso.'

The old man was stronger than anyone had ever thought, but cunning goes farther than strength.

That day Celso had said to Count Ausano as that gentleman sat over his wine:

'In truth, most illustrious, my mother's husband is a good man; and I should be the first to say so, but he is a poor worker, he is old-fashioned, he is obstinate, he ruins the soil, sir, though he means well—oh! he means excellently well. But he understands nothing of the new ways and the new dressings; if I had the ground, sir, instead of him, I should make it yield treble, merely by having my wits about me, and by whipping up those lazy boys and girls.'

And Ausano, who was taken with this replica

of his own early manhood, and pleased with the obsequious and deferential manner of Chiara's son, listened, and was biassed, as Celso desired him to be; and began to turn over in his mind how he could best provide for this youngster so that the provision should cost little, and profit himself much.

He foresaw many uses to which he could put one who could be easily attached to his interests. The woman was odious, he wished never to see her again; but this plausible youngster, with the face of a fool and the wits of a rogue, pleased him. He perceived that this fellow, who was said to be his son, and who probably might be so, for features do not lie, was a knave; but Ausano was a vain, self-satisfied man, and such men always think that the knaves whom they purchase will never cheat themselves, but will only cheat others for them.

Celso was coarse and rude and evil-spoken with his equals, but, like his mother, he could have a smooth tongue and a fawning docility when they were necessary.

He knew as little about agriculture as it is possible for a person born and bred on a farm to

do; the last thing he intended to do was to lead the dull laborious home-bound life of a peasant; but he wanted first of all to have his putative father and his putative brothers and sisters in his power, and if he could manage the lord of Affiorelli in this matter he could in other matters, for he reasoned very justly who gets an inch can take an ell. So he bore himself very discreetly, very cleverly, and with great self-control in this first momentous interview; never presuming in the least to take advantage of his position; and hinting, rather than coarsely declaring, that his mother had brought him up with one aim, one hope, one thought in life, and that one to be worthy of his hidden parentage.

Ausano saw through him. He perceived the craft, the wiliness, the comedy of it all; but these diverted him, and the flattery of himself more than half deceived him into belief in it.

The youth left his presence the richer for two glasses of brandy tossed down his throat, a bundle of good cigars put in his pocket, a hundred-franc note in his hand, and a vague promise from his host that he should be provided for in some agree-

able manner. In his mind's eye he saw himself the future steward of the whole of this fine property, which it would have taken a good rider to ride round in half a day.

And going down the hill with these visions dancing before him in the golden haze raised by the brandy, he met this insolent old man, who had ventured to call him a bye-blow!

That evening the suitor, Nattalino, came down from the pinewoods to make his first visit of courtship. He was very shy and sheepish, and did not look to advantage. These country lads and lasses are charming in their loose workaday clothes, with bare arms and legs, and rough locks flying loose; but in their Sunday garb they are ridiculous, ill at ease, and foolish.

Bina said good-day to him, and little else. She had lost her ruddy colour, was nervous and silent, and hid herself in the cows' stable the best part of the afternoon.

Her cousins tried to please the young woodlander in her stead; he was a coveted dainty, which they grudged her, as they grudged the vicarage coffee.

He looked admiringly at Petronilla, who was the handsomest of the three, and the sauciest.

Abbondio felt, with trouble and sorrow, that you cannot build up lives, and make them round, and sound, and comely, as easily as you can build up a stack of straw. He was heavy of heart, for he meant to carry out the threat he had made to the son of Ausano; but he was well aware that he was no match for either Celso, or Celso's mother, in cunning and intrigue, and that they might easily evade such observation of them as he had leisure to compass. The children, too, would all conspire to help them; for Chiara had entire influence over them, male and female, and they preferred their mother's idle, careless ways, and capricious affection to his own steadier rule and more conscientious love.

'It is hard to have one's own brood banded together against one,' he thought bitterly, as he turned back from accompanying the young Nattalino as far on his way as the edge of the river, where the fording place was, which strong youngsters preferred to going further down for the use of the bridge.

In the grass as he went along he saw a hedgehog walking, also out on a Sunday evening stroll, with three little spiky black pigs in its wake; its offspring.

'Poor Thorny! nay, happy Thorny!' he thought. 'His young ones do not roll up in their prickles against him.'

No; they were content to do as he did, to sleep under rotten leaves, to creep about amongst the docks and plantain, to eat slugs and snails and berries, to be content with the earth and the sun and the dews. Happy, happy Thorny!

He let the little family pursue their harmless way in peace and did not kill them with his stick, to eat them afterwards, as anyone of his neighbours would have done.

The days passed, and the weeks, and he could not detect either his wife or her son in any communication with the villa of Affiorelli. Yet he was certain that communication they had. Chiara was excitable, nervous, elated, full of importance as only a silly woman can be; she caressed her daughters frequently, and gave them little presents. Celso

was doubtless supplied with money, for there were none of the appeals on his behalf always previously made by his mother on the eve of saints' days and Sundays. He had more clothes, more tobacco, more false jewels in rings and pins, and he was almost perpetually absent; his sisters often whispered about him in admiring conceit, but they kept his secret safely. Bina said nothing; she was always busy in the fields, or amongst the cattle, or down by the brook with the linen, beating and dipping and wringing.

One fine afternoon there came riding on a bay horse through the farm a stout dark florid man, who called to Abbondio, who was hoeing a plot of young cabbages:

'Are you Castellani, the *capoccio*, here?'

Abbondio straightened his back and leaning on his hoe lifted his hat from instinct; then seeing or guessing who it was, put his hat on again and remained silent.

'Your land is very badly kept,' said the rider; 'look at all those nettles; and you are backward with your winter vegetables, and your trees are straggling

and poor, and your grass paths are all cut up with ruts; everything is bad.'

Abbondio, keeping his hat on his head, answered:

'I know it as well as you do.'

'Your manners are not much better than your tillage,' said the rider. 'Do you know who I am?'

'I know that too, very well,' said Abbondio, and he began again to hoe between his young cabbages.

Ausano rode on; the hoofs of his fidgety horse cutting up the turf underneath him. Chiara, who was at a little distance farther on, picking uprooted potatoes off the earth and sorting them, dropped him a humble curtsey as became a peasant to her lord. His horse splashed some mud into her face: she wiped it off and kissed it, thinking Ausano would see. Abbondio did see, though he was stooping over his young cabbages, twenty yards away.

A rush of fierce hot blood went from his heart to his head. Rage, shame, and disgust were furious within him.

A big stone lay within touch of his hoe; it cost him much not to hurl it at the rider whose horse's

hoofs seemed to cast up at him all the bitterness and contumely of his life.

He had been a peaceable, gentle, and law-abiding man all his years, but he understood for the first time how good men may become criminals. With strong self-restraint he resumed his work, weeding and stoning the rows between the young plants.

Planted late? Ay, true; they were planted two months too late. But what could he do with only the unwilling boys and girls to help him, and no money to pay hired labour? He laboured from break of day to starlight, but two hands cannot do the work which wants six or eight.

Many men of his class in his place would have turned the position to profit and have tried to make some claim on the new owner of Filibrana, but Abbondio came of an ancient and honourable stock. He would have died in a ditch sooner than have touched a bronze halfpenny, or any bit or drop, from his wife's early lover.

Chiara, when the bay horse was out of sight, straightened her back, wiped her hands on her skirt,

and leaving the potatoes on the ground, went towards the house.

'She knew he was coming this way,' thought her husband. 'That is why she came to sort the potatoes.'

Without some ulterior motive she never did field work, unless forcibly driven to it.

How could he get rid of her and her son? In some way he was resolved to clear his house of them. They were a daily and hourly outrage to him. But to turn them out was very difficult. No law would help him: they did not transgress the law. She was his wife till the day of her death, do what she might, and her son was his in the eyes of all men.

An unlearned and moneyless man is helpless; he may strive and struggle as he will, he cannot escape from a bad woman or a false position. He might have gone away certainly, but to do so no more occurred to him than it does to the oyster on its rocky bed. Besides, an honest and an affectionate parent does not leave his sons and daughters to chance. So long as they live they rivet him down to their place.

Moreover the mind of Abbondio was entirely restricted to the boundaries of his birthplace. He had never in all his days been farther than ten miles off, north, south, east, and west. The town was only to him a place where you got rid of good money in bad fashions. The intelligence of the peasant is blurred, confused, shackled; it is as helpless and awkward, taken out of its daily range, as a trout taken out of water. It is this which makes the rustic so dear to the demagogue.

Now and then the inclination moved him to go and take counsel from the village priest; that Don Placido whose coffee was so sweet to the taste of 'Nilla and 'Vina and 'Ciccia. But the old belief in ecclesiastical wisdom and good faith is not so strong in the peasantry as it was of old, and the vicar did not bear the best of characters; his parishioners' tongues were often clacking at his expense with regard to S'iora Marta, who was not so aged, nor so discreet, nor so ill-favoured as it is desired that all priests' housekeepers should be, for their own good and that of their flock.

Abbondio felt that he could never bring himself

to tell even in the confessional of his own disgrace and deception in wedding the light o' love of Count Ausano and giving his own name to her love-child. Besides, what could the vicar do? Priests are in these days shy of making themselves in any way partisans of poor men, or in any degree hostile to persons of influence. Don Placido, he knew, would say that it was four-and-twenty years too late to alter anything, and that what cannot be cured must be endured.

But to put out of his house Chiara and her son he was resolved, as soon as he could have testimony indisputable of their intercourse with the master of Affiorelli. The law would be against him, but he intended to take the law unto himself. He would not let his roof shelter either as soon as he had positive proof that one, or other, or both, touched the money of Ausano. They might turn him off his land if they would, if they could; he would not hold it through any shameful grace of theirs.

One market-day he went into the town and enquired of a man he knew—a notary's head clerk—if it were true that three hundred years'

occupancy and tillage of the land bestowed no title to it.

'Quite true,' said the clerk.

'And if it be sold the buyer can turn one out at pleasure?'

'Certainly, with due notice. From seed-time to harvest.'

'And one must pack bag and baggage off the soil where one was born, and twelve generations before us born and dead?'

'Certainly. Why not?'

'Why not?' Abbondio gasped for breath. Arguments did not come to him; but it seemed to him that the reason was as clear as the sun then shining in the heavens.

''Tis an infamy!' he said, the blood rushing to his face.

The clerk laughed.

If there were not such infamies in the world there would be no need for notaries and their clerks, which would be deplorable from the clerk's point of view.

Abbondio drove black Moro through the sunlit ancient streets, so stunned and scared that had the

mule not been sagacious and homesick they would not have left the city without an accident.

It was now October.

The month was full of labour. There was an abundant vintage. The boys and girls laughed and romped more than they worked. Abbondio was so tired every day at this season when he went across his threshold as the full moon rose that all power to think was almost dead in him.

In the absorption of his own anxiety and anger, he had taken less note than usual of Bina. He had arranged for her well being, and sooner or later she would see the wisdom and the advantage of what he had done: so he thought.

Men like him have neither leisure or patience enough to follow the vagaries of a little maiden. They provide for her welfare, body and soul, and they leave the rest to the Madonna or the saints, or whoever it be that up above looks after the virtue and happiness of women.

Had he observed her more closely he would have seen that her colour waned more and more; that her eyes had a look in them like a stricken

hare's, and that though she was not less industrious, there was neither blitheness nor briskness in her work.

A woman would have seen, the women did see and laughed unkindly amongst each other, but Abbondio, being a man, did not. Yet he loved her dearly.

But at the vintage time, when all are merry and noisy, and young people love to jump about and shout and laugh, even he, weary and absorbed as he was, could not but be struck by the silence and dulness of his little niece, by her heavy eyes, and by her slow, changed movements. One night, when the others were all romping by the yellow light of petroleum to the discordant strains of an accordion, ill-played by Rufo's rude hands, Abbondio followed her out to her usual refuge, the cows' stables. It was a bright moonlit light, and the clear white radiance shone through the one little window on to the figure of Bina seated on the ground, leaning her head against the stone pillar of the stall in which stood her favourite red and white cow.

'My dear little girl,' said her uncle in his kindest

tones; 'why are you sobbing your heart out here? Are you vexed because 'Nilla makes eyes at your suitor? To be sure, she is a little coquette, and behaves ill to her own poor fellow. But only show yourself, my pretty one, and 'Nilla will ogle Nattalino in vain.'

Bina did not raise her head. Her voice was hoarse with weeping as she answered: 'Let her marry him, Babbo, if she likes him better than her Sandrino. Nattalino is naught to me.'

Abbondio shook her a little roughly. 'Naught to you, Bina? Nought to you? Why, the saints protect me! the marriage is all arranged! He comes here as your suitor! You have never said "No" before! A better lad than he does not live, and a better household to go into there is not in the whole countryside.'

'I am sure of that, Babbo,' said Bina, still turned away from him and crouched against the stone column. 'Give him to 'Nilla. Her Sandrino is too poor for her.'

'His father would not take 'Nilla,' said Abbondio angrily. 'His father knows how lazy, how self-

willed, how useless she is, always thinking of finery and hating all work; 'tis the talk of the countryside how vain and how fine my girls are. You, everybody knows well, will bring a dower in your hands and your feet, and Nattalino and his people——'

Bina rose up wearily and lifted to his gaze in the moonlight her pale, tear-stained, changed little face.

'Dear Babbo, I will not marry Nattalino,' she said, her breath caught by stifled sobs. 'I ought to have told you so before, but I was a coward. I will not marry anyone. I am not very old that it should matter so much.'

'Women marry when they can, not when they will,' said Abbondio, angered and disturbed and perplexed. Then, seeing in the moonlight how sad and altered was this bright baby face, and hearing the stifled sobs in her throat, he cried with sudden rage: ''Tis that rogue's doings! 'Tis that liar and braggart who has filled your ears with boasts and promises and turned your head! You think of Celso, you poor little fool! Celso, who calls himself a noble and——

He stopped himself on the brink of saying what he had kept secret all those years, more years than Bina had years of life. The girl threw her arms about his throat.

'I know, Babbo; at least, I guess. I am so sorry for you; oh, so sorry!'

'Poor, kind little thing!' said Abbondio, much troubled and touched; and he stroked her rippling, curling locks and kissed her. 'Never mind for me, dear,' he said tenderly. 'But I fear that brute has stolen your heart away and put an aching pain in the place. He has not a gentleman's blood for nought. Tell me, my child.'

Bina clung to him and trembled. All the youth in her longed to tell him the whole truth, longed to secure his pity, his defence, his protection, his vengeance; all her weakness longed to appeal to his strength, all the wrong she had suffered moved her to entreat his justice. But she was generous, and she was grateful. If she told him the whole truth, she dreaded the effect her revelation would take on Abbondio. He loved her; he loved her for her own and for his dead brother's sake; were he to know that

his wife's bastard had taken by force what her innocence and pride and modesty had denied to him, she was afraid that her uncle would be so convulsed with rage that he would take some vengeance, not too great, indeed, for human justice, but such as the laws of men would punish. He was so good a man, so just himself, so peaceable, so kind, that in proportion to his long-suffering and his excellence would be his revenge were he ever roused to it. The sweetest wine is the most acid when it turns.

Bina did not reason thus, because she was a little uneducated simple girl, but her intelligence and the instincts of her heart moved her to the consciousness of it. Perhaps the time might come when her uncle would be obliged to know it, but as she clung to him and hid her face upon his breast, she said to herself that from her he should never learn what would add to his burden of shame and sorrow.

'Tell me, Bina,' he urged anxiously, 'tell me the truth. Has not this accursed son of my wife's wooed you and made you promises he never will keep?'

Then Bina, bravely and nobly, lied. 'No, Babbo, no!' she cried hoarsely. 'It has been my own folly.

Celso has jested and played with me, and I have been silly enough to think it meant love. But now I see he does not care, and he is always with that gentleman up at the castle on the hill.'

'Is that so?' muttered Abbondio. 'Is he always up with Ausano?'

'Yes, Babbo,' said the girl, glad to turn him away from the subject of her own relations with Celso. 'Yes, Babbo. I believe he expects great things from that gentleman. But he never has told me much, only stray boastful words about his birth.'

'The miserable strutting turkey-poult that has robbed others of their meal and roost!' cried Abbondio with many a fierce blaspheming oath such as had not scorched his honest tongue for many a day. 'And he has caused you pain, my little one, my dear brother's only daughter? Oh, Bina, Bina! hearken to me, Bina. Think of this wretch no more, and be happy and safe in the marriage I have planned for you. Do, my dear; I pray you, do. For my sake and your own.'

'Not with Nattalino, dear Babbo,' murmured the

girl; 'I could not, I could not! Let me wait; you know I am not old.'

And from that he could not move her, though he argued with her long and with such eloquence as affection lends the dullest.

'And promise me, Babbo,' she murmured as they left the stables, 'promise me to say nothing to Celso; it would only lead to bad words, to ill blood, and it is my own silly vanity which made me think that I was aught to him.'

'Leave Celso to me,' said Abbondio. 'I have been a just man, little one. I deal with all other men according as they deal with me.'

'But he is not to blame, said Bina, her little childish face strained and aged with the effort of the generous lie.

'No, dear. In his mother's eyes, never,' said Abbondio between his teeth; and he added, with savage fury strange in so gentle a man: 'Why, in the name of all the fiends of hell, do blackguards ever get the good word and the hearts of women?'

He was far from dreaming that the wrong done to Bina had been more than boy and girl wooing,

fair promises broken, childish fancy misplaced; but even these were enough to fill to overflowing the cup of bitterness which he drank from Celso's hands.

Celso had not been at those vintage merry-makings; he had gone away a few days before, ostensibly to visit a brother of his mother's, who was a small tradesman in a seaport some forty miles away. But Abbondio did not believe that he had gone to a poor relative who was in a very humble way of business; he believed that some intention or errand or purpose of Count Ausano's was the real reason of a departure so unusual, since no one in these country places ever, by any chance, goes out of his own commune unless conscription forces him to do so.

Anyhow, he was absent; and his absence was as great a relief to Abbondio as though a raging tooth had ceased to throb and ache. On his wife he kept a keen watch, but he could not detect her in any communication with the great house on the hill.

One day she got a letter by post; no doubt from her son, thought Abbondio, as he saw the blue-coated post-lad tossing off a drink of wine which

she offered him, and heard her call 'Nilla, who was her favourite daughter, to come and read the missive for her in the hen-house.

He asked neither wife nor daughter what the letter said, or whence it came: of what use was it to drive them to tell untruths?

Chiara was radiant and triumphant all the day afterwards, her cunning eyes flashing like the facets of two diamonds, and 'Nilla looked mysterious, proud, and important, as one who had been trusted with a fine secret.

'Whatever it be it means no good for my poor little girl,' thought Abbondio. His heart was sore for Bina. He had striven so hardly to keep her happy, and provide a peaceful future for her, so that when he should meet his brother in the world to come, as he felt sure that he should do, he could say to him: 'Here is the little one, Giorgio; safe and sound, and fit to face the saints.'

The time stole on and brought the blackness to the olive berries, and the brownness to the cones of the maize, and gathering of these made busy the golden November days with their gorgeous sunsets

and their wild white cumulus clouds driving before the wind.

Whilst they were all out on the hillside stripping the olive trees and filling skips with the dusky berries, there came up from the fields below one whom his sisters, with a joyous scream, recognised as Celso. He had been three weeks away; and seemed to them another being, so fine was he, so gorgeous, so inflated with swaggering splendour. He was mounted, as they had never seen him, on a stout white cob. He had a new hat set on his curls, and a red kerchief at his throat, and a gold chain across his gaudy waistcoat, and shining jack-boots cased his legs.

Bina, who was standing amongst the branches of an olive tree on the top rung of a ladder, trembled so greatly at the sudden sight of him that she almost fell from her perch.

The others stood agape, with wide-opened eyes and mouth; Abbondio looked once, then went on with his work, where he also stood aloft on the forked trunk of an aged olive. Celso checked the pony, which was breathing fast from the steepness of the

ascent, and gazed at them all with triumph and cruelty in his glittering eyes, his carnation lips, his swelling chest. His glance swept from Bina up amongst the grey leaves to her uncle astride on the two divisions of the trunk.

His hour had come to punish this insolent old man, who had dared to threaten him, and this troublesome thankless maiden, who was always worrying him, and fretting, and telling him of the wrong he had done to her.

'Ho there, good people!' he called, with a crack of his whip in the air; 'I have a bit of news for you. No more idle hours, my youngsters. No more ill-done work, old fellow. I am set over you now. I am under-bailiff, my friends, and I shall be head bailiff in a year over the whole of the Filibrana and Affiorelli estates. Ah, ha! what say you now? If you don't kiss my boots, out you pack, the whole lot of you; and if you don't work to my liking, the sack you will get in a jiffey. Eh, Babbo! eh, Babbo! Won't you praise the Lord for such a son as I?'

Abbondio clutched the branches to save himself

from falling. Bina had hidden her face amongst the silvery foliage. The boys and girls stood aghast amongst the half-filled baskets, wondering, gasping, trembling, yet admiring, for had they not always been taught by their mother to admire Celso? And Celso mounted on a pony and made overseer was to be more than admired; he was to be dreaded, obeyed, adored.

The bright sunlight shone on the green sward, on the silvery trees, on the broad brown ruddy face of the young man as with a smile, which showed all his strong teeth, he sat astride of his white cob, jeering and sneering and crying:

'Out you all go at a word from me! Out you all go, and Babbo Abbondio will be a hired hind and live in a hired room; oh, ho! oh, ho! And as for you, you little minx, hiding your face in the boughs up there, this will teach you what it costs to be coy and chaste with a man like me. I should never have married you, certain sure, because I am going to marry a lady who wears silk gowns and has a big dower, the innkeeper's daughter in the town by the sea, Gemma Sandrucci; but if you had been

kind and easy I would have had you well married to some pretty fellow, instead of telling Nattalino all the truth about you as I shall tell it now.'

With a scream as piteous as a little bird's when an owl seizes it, Bina tottered down the steps of the ladder and flung herself face forward on the turf amidst the yellow blossoms of the dragon's-mouth like a crushed flower herself.

'Oh, ho! oh, ho!' shouted Celso with delight, and behind him a shrill woman's voice echoed his laughter; 'he, he! ha, ha!' as Chiara, who had dragged herself up the hillside to see the sport, peered out from behind the pony's flanks, hot, breathless, wet with perspiration, the kerchief pulled off her hair, and her breast heaving, but radiant with pride and joy and malignity.

Abbondio stood motionless and mute, looking down at the prostrate form of his brother's child, where Bina cowered piteously amongst the grass, as a shot hare might have tried to hide itself.

'Eh, my old man?' cried Chiara to him in her shrill treble, 'which of us will be turned out now? Which of us will have the best of the game? Will

you jeer at my age and my looks when you sit and break stones in the dust of the road, and see me drive by you with my son the steward? The Virgin be praised! we are even with you at last, old ass-at-the-plough as you are, old clod, old sod, the very colour of earth as you are! And you dared to lock the door o' nights against my darling, and you dared to try and set him to work when you knew he had the blood of your betters; and your little jade of an orphan had the impudence to fancy he would take her to church and mayoralty—O Lord! O Lord! —when he is going to marry Gemma Sandrucci, with a dower fit for a duchess and pearls as big as swallow's eggs.' Her triumphant laughter screamed through the air, hoarse and harsh as a tree-frog's croak.

Celso echoed the laugh, his red Bacchus-like mouth wide open, his mirth echoing loud and long, like the blare of a trumpet.

'Ay, ay, she thought to marry me, the little fool! She thought to marry me! Why, if I take her as kitchen drudge to my dame she'll have to go on her knees to thank me. What are you staring at, old

man? Get back to your work. Get up your ladder again. Let the girl lie; she isn't worth the rags that cover her. Get to your work all of you, quick, or I will find the means to make you.'

He lifted his arm and made the lash of his hunting crop circle and whistle and crack in the air.

Abbondio stepped forward towards him, calmly, gravely, without a word, and rested his left hand on the pony's neck to keep it still. Then, with the pruning knife which he held in his right hand, he struck through flesh and bone and muscle, straight to the heart of the wretch whom he had sheltered so many years.

Celso reeled in his saddle, and fell dead.

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